

# **THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE MARVELLOUS IN ADOMNÁN'S LIFE OF COLUMBA**

James Bruce

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



1999

Full metadata for this item is available in  
St Andrews Research Repository  
at:  
<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/13942>

This item is protected by original copyright

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION  
OF THE MARVELLOUS  
IN  
ADOMNÁN'S *LIFE OF COLUMBA*

James Bruce

A thesis submitted for the degree of *Philosophiae Doctor*

St Mary's College  
The Faculty of Divinity  
University of St Andrews

January 18th 1999





ProQuest Number: 10166725

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10166725

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Th  
D 340

## ABSTRACT

Approaches to studying the marvellous aspects of saints' lives have focused on political and ethical aims. Miracles proved sanctity, or flowed from it, and thereby authorised the cult and its modern practitioners. However, the nature and function of marvellous phenomena which provide this authority is little understood. This dissertation argues that the account of the marvellous in Adomnán's *Life of Columba* is fully integrated with a practical Christian tradition broader than the hagiographical genre within which it is normally confined.

First, it undertakes a critical examination of approaches to the study of hagiographical marvels. Adomnán uniquely systematises his account of the marvellous into three distinct categories of prophesy, miracles of power, and visions. The account is compiled by a critical and theologically active mind, with a clear understanding both of historical precedent, and contemporary practical function of marvels. Chapter two critiques the identification of Christian marvels as deriving from pre-Christian pagan magic. Charles Plummer's foundational collection of early Irish literary parallels is analysed and found to be unreliable. Third, the theological concept of the eschatological kingdom, inaugurated by Christ in the first century, and becoming realised across the late antique world, is identified as a key to Adomnán's thought. It is traced in the accounts that he records of marvellous phenomena surrounding Columba. Following from this discovery, the empowering presence of the eschatological Holy Spirit, promised as sign and empowerer of the coming Kingdom, is explored. Adomnán is found to have a sophisticated understanding of the Spirit's operation pre-eminently in the gifts of prophesy. The study concludes with a re-examination of the missionary context of Adomnán's account. The Spirit bringing the Kingdom is the mission of the church. How this is present in the *Life of Columba* reviews the missionary identity of Columba from a new perspective.

*Declarations:*

- (i) I, James Hamilton Bruce, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100 000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date:

Signature of candidate:

- (ii) I was admitted as a research student in November 1995 and as a candidate for the degree of *Philosophiae Doctor* in May 1996; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1995 and 1998.

Date:

Signature of candidate:

- (iii) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degrees of *Philosophiae Doctor* in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date:

Signature of supervisor:

*Copyright declaration.*

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any *bona fide* library or research worker.

© James Bruce 1999

I ngwraig a mhlant i,  
Valerie, Madeleine, Sam, Alexander, a Finlay-William,  
ac i'r gogoniant Dduw,  
efo niolchgarwch wybodus.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. James S. Alexander, my supervisor and mentor, first suggested I might look at Adomnán in what was then a broad enquiry into the nature of 'Celtic Christianity'. He has unfailingly given of his time sharing broad and detailed knowledge of the development of the early church. It is to his quiet but determined guidance and encouragement that the completion of this project is owed. I salute him. I am also most grateful for encouragement to attend and present papers at the Scottish Universities Ecclesiastical History Reading Parties. Constructive criticism and advice during these has been most beneficial. I would particularly mention Prof. Donald Meek of Aberdeen, who gave an early affirmation of the validity of my study; Dr Alan MacQuarrie of Strathclyde who has kept asking the question, 'why is the *Life of Columba* different?', and Dr Ian Bradley of Aberdeen, a regular and most helpful critic. Two others in St Mary's College, in complimentary disciplines, have been more help than they will appreciate, Revd. Trevor Hart, Professor of Divinity, and Richard Bauckham, Professor of New Testament. I wish to record my gratitude to the College for the grants of the Tulloch Scholarship, the Cook and MacFarlan Scholarship, and a St Mary's College Bursary. To the trustees of the Doctor Kenneth Charles Briand Trust I am in debt for their kind support of this Ecclesiastical historian. My colleague who went before, Dr. Darrel Cosden, showed it was possible to survive and thrive during the process.

Across the street in the Department of Medieval History, Dr. Barbara Crawford, Dr. Simon Taylor, Anderson Fellow, and the St Andrews University Committee for Dark Age Studies, on which I have been privileged to sit, have provided further stimulus and enlightenment. Mrs Marjorie Anderson was not only most generous with loans from the library of herself and her late husband which closely resembled my bibliography in shelved form, but also kind enough to suffer numerous questions on the text so central to my study.

Other individuals I must mention include Dr Romola Parish, who though from a completely different discipline, has provided much technical assistance and not a little inspiration. Christine Gasgoine, Keeper of the University library Special Collections, Colin Bovaird, Librarian of St Mary's College, and Linda Innocent, erstwhile assistant, and now promoted, have provided for never failing assistance.

My four year-old daughter's 'how are you getting on Papa' has been a most delightful

spur to submission. Valerie, my life, tolerated magnificently my spending three years sitting in a chair reading, and provided never-failing sustenance to keep going, in many forms. At the same time she has nurtured our growing brood of infant children, Madeleine, Alexander, and Finlay-William; managed the family household; was Chairman of the N.E.Fife National Childbirth Trust ; co-led an interdenominational Parents and Toddlers group, and a Mums' Bible study, and pursued gainful employment in her few spare moments. In this, our ninth year of marriage, I honour her, and dedicate to her this work, insignificant though it is in comparison with her achievement.



# CONTENTS

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Abstract         | ii  |
| Declarations     | iii |
| Acknowledgements | vi  |
| Contents         | vii |
| Abbreviations    | xi  |

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| PREFACE | 1 |
|---------|---|

## I. INTRODUCTION: APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF THE MARVELLOUS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| A. The study of the marvellous within the study of hagiography         | 8  |
| 1. Rejecting the historical reality of the marvellous                  | 9  |
| 2. Historico-critical or allegorical interpretations                   | 11 |
| a. <i>Proving sanctity</i>   | 12 |
| b. <i>Political function of the marvellous</i>                         | 15 |
| c. <i>Adomnán the Teacher</i>  | 21 |
| 3. Cautious openness   | 24 |
| a. <i>Recognising the validity of early beliefs</i>                    | 24 |
| b. <i>Antique awareness of the doubtful veracity of the marvellous</i> | 26 |
| c. <i>Recognising a different reality</i>                              | 27 |
| B. Studying the marvellous in the <i>Life of Columba</i>               | 28 |
| C. The question of functioning nature                                  | 32 |
| D. The way forward   |    |
| 1. Sixth/seventh century understanding                                 | 33 |
| 2. The shape of things to come   | 34 |

## II. PAGAN MYTHOLOGICAL NATURE

|  |    |
|--|----|
| A. Paganism, Christianity and Early Irish Literature               | 36 |
| B. Heathen mythology in Plummer's <i>Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae</i> | 39 |
| C. A question of Origins   | 44 |
| 1. Late oral secular sources                                       | 46 |
| 2. Late literary secular sources                                   |    |
| a. Texts   | 48 |
| b. Commentary  | 49 |
| 3. Early secular sources   |    |
| a. Texts   | 52 |
| b. Commentary  | 57 |
| i. Chronology  | 61 |
| ii. Similarity of description and vector of influence              | 65 |
| (a) Christian vs. Druidic Prophecy                                 | 66 |
| (b) Healing  | 72 |
| (c) Cloak of invulnerability                                       | 74 |
| D. Plummer's presuppositions                                       | 77 |
| E. Plummer and biblical influence                                  | 82 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| III. THE FLOWERING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE ISLES OF THE OCEAN         |     |
| A. Introducing the servant of the Divine Gardener                          | 85  |
| 1. The Kingdom of God in the <i>Life of Columba</i>                        | 87  |
| a. Kingdom in the monastery  | 88  |
| b. Kingdom in the world beyond the vallum                                  | 89  |
| 2. The flowering of faith  | 90  |
| B Eschatology in the milieu of seventh century Ireland                     | 94  |
| C. The Coming Kingdom in the <i>Life of Columba</i>                        | 97  |
| 1. The Kingdom of God as good news to the poor                             | 97  |
| 2. The Kingdom of the God of the marvellous harvest                        | 98  |
| 3. The Kingdom of God in the kingdom of animals                            | 102 |
| 4. The Kingdom of God in healing   | 112 |
| 5. The messengers of the Kingdom: Angels                                   | 114 |
| 6. Foes of the Kingdom: Demons.  | 120 |
| 7. The Glory of the Kingdom: Heavenly Light                                | 123 |
| 8. Judgement   | 130 |
| D. Conclusion  | 132 |
| IV. THE INDWELLING OUTWORKING ESCHATOLOGICAL SPIRIT                        |     |
| A. Manifestations of the eschatological Spirit                             | 133 |
| B. Spirit in the <i>Life of Columba</i>                                    | 138 |
| 1. The Spirit in Columba:  | 139 |
| a. Columba, Jonah, Dove, Spirit.   | 140 |
| b. The Spirit offered a dwelling in Columba's dove-like heart.             | 142 |
| c. Three operations of the Spirit in Columba                               | 145 |
| 2. Columba and the 'Spirit of Prophecy'                                    | 148 |
| a. Columba as preacher   | 150 |
| b. Columba as prophet  | 153 |
| i. The Holy Spirit prophesies the future through Columba.                  | 157 |
| ii. Prophetic disclosure of absent things: revelations of knowledge.       | 163 |
| 3. Actions ascribed to the spirit of Columba                               | 176 |
| C. Conclusion  | 178 |
| V. THE MARVELLOUS AS A TOOL OF MISSION                                     |     |
| A. Summary   | 182 |
| B. Columba the missionary re-examined                                      |     |
| 1. Bringing the Picts to faith?  | 182 |
| 2. <i>Peregrinatio</i> in the <i>Vita Columbae</i>                         | 185 |
| 3. Missiological activity in the <i>Vita Columbae</i>                      | 187 |
| C. The Marvellous and mission: signs, wonders and spiritual gifts as tools | 194 |
| D. Continuity of signs, wonders and gifts to the sixth century.            | 199 |
| E. Columba the Ascetic Missionary  | 207 |
| F. Conclusion  | 209 |
| VI. CONCLUSION   | 211 |

## APPENDICES

1. Distribution of marvellous phenomena in the *Vita Columbae* 215
2. Excursus on the influence of Gregory's *Dialogues* on Iona. 217

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

220

## ABBREVIATIONS

- A&A A.O. & M.O. Anderson (1961 or 1991 editions indicated by date).
- A The English translation of the *Vita Columbae* by A&A
- B The English translation of the *Vita Columbae* by A.P. Forbes, Bishop of Brechin.
- C&M Clancy and Markus (1995).
- Conf. *The Confession of St Patrick*, quoted from Howlett (1994), but retaining the traditional chapter numbering.
- Coll. The Conferences of John Cassian, English tr from Luibheid, based on the edition of Pichery, SC 42, 54, 64; 1955-9).
- F The English translation of the *Vita Columbae* by Fowler.
- H The English translation of the *Vita Columbae* by Huyshe.
- HE Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. & tr. B. Colgrave & R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford 1969).
- JRSAI Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.
- Lap&S Lapidge and Sharpe (1985), *Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature*.
- L&S Lewis and Short, *Dictionary of Latin* (Oxford 1879).
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (1980).
- NT New Testament
- ODCC *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn, 1997.
- OT Old Testament
- PG *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, (Paris 1857-66).
- PL *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1844-64)
- S The English translation of the *Vita Columbae* by Sharpe (1995).
- SC *Sources Chrétiennes*, Editions du Cerf, Paris.
- SLH *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*.
- SHR *Scottish Historical Review*.
- TBC *Táin Bó Cúalnge*.
- VA *Vita Antonii*. English quotations from Gregg (1980), based on PG 26.835-978, (now see G.J.M. Bartelink (1994), SC 400), corrected against Evagrius' Latin tr. (PL 73.125-170) (now see Bartelink, *Vita de Santi*, I, Milan 1974).
- VC Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, Adomnán's *Life of Columba* (Thomas Nelson, London 1961, revised 1991). (Unless otherwise attributed, all English and Latin quotations of VC are from A&A (1991).
- VSH *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Plummer (1910).
- VSM *Vita Sancti Martini*, the *Life of St Martin* of Tours by Sulpicius Severus.

Following Picard(1987), and McNamara(1987), Latin Biblical quotations are Vulgate, with Psalms from *Psalmi juxta LXX*, Weber(1969). English quotations are RSV. Where Vulgate and RSV diverge, I have provided an English transliteration.

Chapter references to the *VC* are those established by Fowler, now standard. They differ in places from those of Reeves. Where reference is made to longer chapters, I have suggested subdivisions e.g. (i37a, b, c), or the MS folio references from A&A.

## PREFACE

Richard Sharpe, the most recent translator of Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, concludes his introduction to Mediaeval Irish Saint's Lives, saying;

[Plummer's] recognition that the *vitae* illuminate aspects of how the authors of the *vitae* and their audience perceived the spiritual aspects of their world has still to be followed up.<sup>1</sup>

Supernatural marvellous phenomena are dominant among these aspects, shown by their comprising so much of the popular literature of the day. That the writers believe in the possibility and historical occurrence of these phenomena is becoming clearer.<sup>2</sup> However the question of what it is they believe the phenomena to be, and what it is they believe the phenomena to be for, in the theatre in which they are described as operating, is poorly understood. This thesis aims to elucidate the understanding of one of these early authors in regard to examples one group of those phenomena less investigated even than the rest: those recorded as operating through the ministry of an earthly, as distinct from an heavenly, saint. This is to say marvels *reported as* accompanying the ministry of a saint during his life on earth, not after his burial as his cult was being established.<sup>3</sup> It will do this through the lens of arguably the most important example of the genre for the purpose, Adomnán's *Life of Columba*. It hopes to provide a deeper understanding of what Adomnán thought the phenomena were, and what he thought they were for in the context in which he depicts them, as he employed them to his purposes in writing.

Students of hagiography have become familiar with the identification of the function of this literary genre as a tool for its authors to use at the time of writing. Political and didactic aims are built upon the foundation of proving the sanctity of the saint whose repute is to be employed in making the author's case. Sanctity is demonstrated using the device of attributing to the saint various supernatural phenomena. These phenomena include nature miracles of various sorts, such as power over the elements, transmutation, cures, and displays of what is often termed vengeful power. There are also manifestations of supernatural insight and foresight, visions of earthly and heavenly scenes, and encounters both in vision and in 'real life' with angelic and demonic spiritual beings. These marvellous attributes are what identify the sanctity, the closeness to God, of an individual, and thus provide the authority for the literary purposes of the hagiographer. The nature and function of the phenomena are thus

---

1 Sharpe(1991)388 citing Plummer(1910), (*VSH*).

2 See, for instance, Peterson(1984)90-121, and McCready(1989 &1994).

3 For a preliminary but detailed discussion of Columba's posthumous miracles, see Clancy(1997).

understood at the level of literary employment. The literary forms of the descriptions of the marvellous as we have them in the extant texts are also understood as literary devices adopted and adapted from the genre. However, the underlying nature and function of the putative real phenomena which provide these devices, as understood by their hagiographical employers, remains unsubstantiated, whatever the way in which they are employed to meet the author's aim.

How do the accounts of the marvellous correspond to the belief systems within the world view of the writers? Marvellous phenomena provide a particularly problematic challenge to modern historical analysis. They are a category inadmissible as possible to modern rationalism.<sup>4</sup> However, these phenomena have been integral to Christian tradition from its foundation, and many claim that they have remained stubbornly so despite the enlightenment. Eastern Orthodoxy has maintained a pneumatology which includes such phenomena. They continue to form the essential qualification for beatification and canonization in the Roman Catholic Church. They are claimed as continuing by what are fast growing global Christian traditions, the pentecostal and charismatic movements. This thesis aims to explore the view Adomnán held in the seventh century.

The *Vita Columbae* (hereafter *VC*), was written a century after the death of Columba, first abbot of Iona (d.597), by the ninth abbot, Adomnán (d.704) after the first hundred and thirty years of the development of Columba's paruchia. *VC* has an established provenance in linguistic, literary, and historical terms,<sup>5</sup> and thus provides a reasonably firm text with which to investigate the nature and purpose of the marvellous in a hagiographical source.<sup>6</sup> The definitive edition and translation

---

4 See Heffernan(1988) for a comprehensive critique of the weakness of this approach in bringing understanding to hagiographical study.

5 Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* was first edited in modern times by Bollandist Stephen White SJ, in 1621. He was followed by John Colgan (1647); William Ussher (1656); and William Reeves (1857). In 1874, Reeve's notes were edited and rearranged by W.F.Skene, and a free translation supervised by A.P. Forbes, Bishop of Brechin, added to augment a work still highly regarded. Fowler further edited Reeve's text, including additional notes (1894, new edition 1920) and added a more literal translation (1895). In this century Wentworth Huyshe rendered a further translation in 1905 (corrected 1937), and Sharpe one in 1995. For extensive bibliographies of secondary studies, see Herbert(1988a), Sharpe(1995) and Clancy & Markus(1995) (hereafter C&M). Columba died 'Sunday, 9 June 597' (Sharpe(1995)1, C&M 96).

6 I am relying on the now standard account of Herbert(1988a), which sees *VC* as based on an earlier account by seventh abbot Cumme (d.669), probably written 640-50. Herbert believes Cumme based his account on an even earlier record compiled by his uncle, abbot Ségéne (623-652), thus the written authority may stretch back to within 27 years of Columba's death. The Schaffhausen codex identifies the scribe as Dorbbéne, Bishop of Iona (d.713) [for abbot, there is some dispute (cf. A&A(1991)xliv-xlv.); it is thus closer in date to its original than any other Irish Life.



published by Alan Orr and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson in 1961, revised by Marjorie Anderson in 1991,<sup>7</sup> provides the foundation for this study. Hughes describes VC as

the work of a learned man with conscientious scholarly standards. We should therefore be able to rely on its incidental information (1966, 224).

Building on Hughes' sympathy, and following the Andersons, Picard argues for the reliability of Adomnán's historical style which he compares with that of Bede. Like Bede, Adomnán provides witnesses for many of the events he records.<sup>8</sup> Herbert records:

[Adomnán] is often concerned to provide authentication for the miracle stories he tells, and it has been suggested that some effort was made at Iona to collect formal *testimonia* during the early seventh century (1988a, 7-9).

In his studies of Adomnán's earlier *De Locis Sanctis*,<sup>9</sup> O'Loughlin confirms his opinion of Adomnán as

a most careful and accurate scholar...[whose work]...can stand alongside Augustine, equalling it in exegetical skill and augmenting it in content. (1997, 110-111)

While being generally supportive of Adomnán as a reliable author, Sharpe re-introduces an important caution in referring to VC:

---

7 All chapter references below are to those found in Anderson & Anderson(1991) (A&A).

8 Picard(1984), citing A&A(1961): 'Adomnán inclines to use battles as dating points' (p.67), referring to events which are independently supported in Annular records, and is often preferred by modern commentators even over-against Bede (see e.g. p.42 regarding the dating of the battle of Degastan). He is accepted as evidence for references to his contemporary milieu, but not Columba's, e.g. political boundaries: '...he implies that all the land to the west of the spine, or watershed, was the territory of the Scots of Britain; not only in his own time, for which his evidence about this must be accepted, but in the time of Columba, for which he is not evidence.' (p.76) On other occasions, A&A are prepared to accept Adomnán's account for Columba, e.g. p.84, their comment on Columba conversing with Broichan without an interpreter is taken as an indication of the Druid's facility in 'Irish'. Picard(1984) agrees, and adds: 'Adomnán uses some of the methods and techniques which have been attributed only to the best historians.' (51), naming the quotation of sources (53), the use of the Iona chronicle (54), his formal historical style after the Classical and Latin historians (55-6); and he argues against too dismissive an attitude on the basis of the hundred year gap: '...in mediaeval historiography one hundred years is a relatively short period...'. Picard affirms the reliability of the information of contemporary life (58), and agrees with Duncan(1981) on VC being a better historical source for Columba's and Adomnán's careers than HE (69). He concludes in a comment on Hughes' contrast of Celtic and Bedan history '[Bede's more modern] approach does not necessarily make his history more reliable' (70). Sharpe(1995)56-7 takes Adomnán's lack of references to written materials and preference for testimonial from named witnesses to underline the credibility of what he writes as being in accord with current Irish legal preference for eyewitness over documentary testimony. Adomnán was not writing history in the modern sense of being concerned with time, but in being concerned with the veracity of his sources in attesting to the miraculous events described (60). His sixth century politics is dubious as he is more interested in divine ordination (60-1). In all, the acceptance of Adomnán as a *verax historicus* (Picard(1984)56) appears to be gaining ground, though he is not infallible. The material for which he is accepted only includes historical, and not marvellous, data.

9 Edited by Meehan(1958); new edition by O'Loughlin forthcoming. O'Loughlin builds on his earlier studies of 1992, 1994a/b, 1995, to form this high opinion of Adomnán's merit as a writer.



Adomnán sometimes cites informants by name even when he is borrowing from a literary source such as Gregory. We cannot be confident of the exact fidelity of Adomnán's account, nor even whether he was concerned to write what he thought to be factually correct. Historical truth has always been alien to the aims of hagiography.<sup>10</sup>

However, while Adomnán may borrow a sentence occasionally, and have borrowed the idea of writing the *Life*, he does not appear to adopt the emphases and priorities of his predecessors. Antony is presented as the model ascetic, with a life of solitude and fasting, doing battle with demons; Martin is clearly on mission to combat both paganism and the demonic. The *VC* is also unlike its Irish predecessors.<sup>11</sup> Sharpe takes the account as the writer intends:

While borrowing the basic shape of the *Life* of St Martin, Adomnán has set out his own argument, organising his book around the three proofs that St Columba was a man of God.<sup>12</sup>

This leads us to the central feature of Adomnán's *Life of Columba* which marks it out as especially pertinent as a work upon which to perform this study. Many commentators have noted the careful and deliberate division of the *VC* into its three *libelli*, collections of prophecies, miracles of power, and visions of angels and heavenly light.<sup>13</sup> Picard points to what he sees as a progression in importance of phenomenon, reaching the ultimate accolade of the glory of heavenly light.<sup>14</sup> Whatever the rationale for his division, the fact identifies Adomnán as a 7th century Christian leader, about whom we have collateral evidence in *De Locis Sanctis*<sup>15</sup> and *Lex Innocentium*, who demonstrates a particular, somewhat systematic understanding of the varied nature of the marvellous he employs to make his case.

---

10 Sharpe(1991)11. (See excursus, appendix 2).

11 See Picard(1985) and Stancliffe(1992) for comparative treatments.

12 Sharpe(1995)58

13 Stancliffe(1983)86-102, McCone (1984)30, Picard(1985)74-6, Herbert(1988a)138 make similar points, dependent upon Fontaine (1967-9)92-5, regarding a possible influence from *VSM*. Herbert confirms the uniqueness of the threefold division of subject matter in Latin hagiography. Irish Augustine's treatise has a three part structure, but it is based on the distribution of the marvellous in the Bible, not the categories of marvellous phenomena themselves. Sulpicius's three-part division of the short account of miracles in *VSM* (miracles vs. rural pagans(12-15); miracles vs urban garrisons (16-19); diabolic illusions (20-24) is wholly unlike Adomnán's both in length and more especially, subject matter.

14 Picard(1985)76. Being depicted as surrounded by heavenly light of glory remains the sixth of seven honours authorised to a canonized saint in the Roman Constitution. (ODCC(1997)280b).

15 Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* also incorporates mention of the marvellous. However, they inevitably occur in the Eastern Mediterranean geographical context of the work. They are chronologically removed from Columba's time, and the marvels are posthumous. As such, though it would provide an important comparative study to this present, they fall outside the immediate area of inquiry of this dissertation. I have made the decision to concentrate on the *VC* and its Columban context so as to give its marvels the fullest possible attention. *De Locis* shows Adomnán to have a wider than hagiographical interest and belief in the marvellous, confirming the importance of a study of the *VC*'s record. For studies of *De Locis*, see O'Loughlin in the bibliography.

Other reasons for choosing the VC include its position as one of the four earliest Irish Latin lives, written before the explosion of hagiographical interest in that region; its relative proximity to its subject compared with the lives of Brigit and Patrick; and its unique status as a document for the study of Scottish ecclesiastical history. It is written at a time close to the earliest evangelisation of the Pictish Provinces, so this study may help to illuminate Christian origins in Scotland north of the Forth. It remains an open question in the scholarly community as to why this work differs in form and character from other members of its genre.<sup>16</sup>

*Terminology:*

Geographical: Adomnán attributes to Mochta a prenatal prophecy that Columba will become famous through 'all the Provinces of the Isles of the Ocean'.<sup>17</sup> He later refers to 'the Isles of the Ocean, namely Ireland and Britain'.<sup>18</sup> Columba placed his monasteries, he says, within the boundaries of the population of the Picts, and of the Irish in Britain (i.e. Dal Riada), separated by mountains of the spine of Britain. Protection from the plague does not extend to the Irish in Ireland though Adomnán explicitly records Columban activity there. Adomnán may mean by 'all the Provinces...' the whole of Britain and Ireland in an optimistic sense. However he presents his patron as acting in the lands of the Picts and Irish in Britain, and also in the north of Ireland. 'The Provinces', though not entirely satisfactory, thus provides a term to employ in this work when referring to the region of Columba's recorded ministry.

That these Provinces were in direct intercourse with Continental and Mediterranean Christianity is now affirmed, for example, by Leslie Alcock:

Despite the clear literary evidence of contacts in the religious field between Britain and Ireland on the one hand, and Gaul, North Africa, and even Egypt on the other, it was generally held that the Anglo-Saxon invasions had cut the Celtic west off from Mediterranean civilisation: hence the peculiarities of the Celtic church. We now see that in archaeological as well as in religious terms the concept of the isolation of the Celtic west is a myth, or at best only a very partial truth...<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Alan MacQuarrie for emphasising this point at the Scottish Universities Ecclesiastical History Reading Party, Perth, 1996.

<sup>17</sup> 'omnes insularum ociani prouincias' (3a). See O'Loughlin (1997)20f for the significance of the designation.

<sup>18</sup> 'ociani insulae per totum, uidelicet Scotia et Brittannia' (102b).

<sup>19</sup> Alcock(1971)206, and see pp.134-5.

The *VC* is written with a clear sense of this connection in Adomnán's thought, and we will observe this connection with the mainstream tradition of the faith from the perspective of his accounts of the marvellous.

**Miracles:** One of the underlying questions to the investigation concerns the influence of the foundational text of the Bible on Adomnán's thought. Students of early Irish literature, in Latin and the vernacular, are increasingly confident of the profound influence of the Latin Bible upon these writers' thought, structure, theme, and description.<sup>20</sup> I wish to propose a system of categorization of marvellous phenomena which takes full account of the biblical archetypes, and does not group records according to modern functional categories such as those used by Derouet, followed by Picard and Stancliffe. As the discussion will show, dividing the marvellous into 'vertical' and 'horizontal or practical' does not take account either of the described effect of all categories, nor of the functional nature which Adomnán describes for them. Healing, discernment, demonic expulsion, miracles of power all depend in the *VC* on God's direct intervention, though they are applied in the 'horizontal' plane. Prophecy and angelic manifestations directly affect others in the *VC*, though they derive from a vertical relationship.

Full discussion of the categories will be found below, but as an aid to description in the ongoing text, I will briefly define the various terms here, led by Adomnán himself. Prophetic phenomena can be divided into two categories. Firstly, Columba comes to know by other than unaided natural senses of situations, events, factors etc. occurring in the present. These can be termed gifts of knowledge (1Cor12.8). Secondly, Columba comes to know of future events, and can be said to predict/prophesy their occurrence. For convenience I will term these 'prophecies'. Either of these may, in biblical terms, represent the revelation of God through the prophet. Spiritual sight or vision is a sub-category of the prophetic, when God reveals something in pictorial rather than verbal form. Spiritual discernment is a similar phenomenon, where the presence and nature of spirits, their effects, or of truth/falsehood is revealed. Deliverance from demonization is linked to this last. Healing needs little explanation, except to note that in *VC*, miraculous healing is detailed. In one instance (i17), Adomnán indicates the healing which comes as a result of repentance thus linking healing and salvation. Vengeance miracles do occur: ii22&25 represent Columba's involvement in delivering judgement; ii23&24 show him merely prophesying its advent. Miracles of power include command over the elements, objects, animals, and judgement. The appearance of angels, and of heavenly light form the final categories

---

20 For instance, O'Reilly(1997), McCone(198

of marvellous phenomena in the *VC*. All can be termed miracles, though Paul, with Adomnán following, discerns a particular category of 'miracle' as one of the whole collection. I thus adopt their terminology, and will refer to the whole collection as 'the marvellous'.

The incidences of the various types of marvellous phenomena in the *VC* are collated and displayed in exhaustive tabular, summary and graphical form in the appendix. Perhaps the most interesting feature to note is the incidence of the manifestation of prophetic marvels throughout the *Life*. Adomnán's presentation is not what we might expect for one deliberately created to display various phenomena in clearly delineated categories. Rather, they reflect the interrelatedness of the marvellous phenomena that we observe in biblical accounts of their use in the mission to establish the Kingdom of God. For instance, prophecy and knowledge work together in ii5 to direct a healing gift to the daughter of Daiméne.

Names: I have adopted Sharpe's form of personal and place names, except within quotations..

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction:

### Approaches to the Study of the Marvellous

#### *A. The study of the Marvellous within the study of Hagiography.*

Before commencing a study of Adomnán's descriptions of the marvellous, we must take account of approaches to these phenomena. The question is made particularly complicated with the epistemological and hermeneutic problems of how marvellous phenomena should be treated. The world view of the reader has been shown in recent years to deeply influence what he/she will allow the author to have meant when he wrote.<sup>1</sup> Modern interest in hagiography has coincided with the dominance in academic circles of liberal rationalism. This world view inhibits the modern reader from understanding the world view of the authors of these documents, especially in regard to elucidating the place of the marvellous in their thought and claimed experience.

Ó Briain (1945, 339) noted four classes of scholarly approach in a regrettably brief statement which has not been pursued. The first and largest group are those who 'have adopted an attitude of credulous reverence for miracle and wonder narratives' whose research has 'been rendered almost valueless for want of sane critical attitude towards the marvellous'. The second, smaller group of 'agnostic historians...denied *a priori* the possibility of divine intervention in human affairs, and, prior to and independently of all evidence, they vitiated their historical vision by excluding the miraculous on philosophical or supposedly scientific principles of problematic and unverifiable validity.' The third group neither accept nor reject the miracles, but seek to rationalize them, finding naturalistic explanations; a de-mythologizing approach. He places himself in the fourth group. These appeal to 'sane historical principles that permit a more objective approach', they are thereby saved 'from the naïve credulity of the hagiographical novice, and the philosophical, and entirely unhistorical, prejudice of the sceptic.' He appears to limit their work to the verification of the historical occurrence of the miracle. They must demand 'unassailable evidence' (as in investigations leading to canonization). They must become conscious of the motives inspiring the writing. They must be cautious in studying commonplace thematic miracles. O'Briain rejects the possibility of verifying cures, food, nature, and animal miracles on the basis of their nature as common themes.

---

1 Again, this thesis is not able to enter the debate, except in the sense that it acknowledges its existence, and that it is involved at a practical level in applying the findings to its own subject of study. For an introduction, see Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking*, (SPCK London 1994).



Ó Briain was surely correct in his assessment of the nature of much hagiographological writing. However, the first group is no longer represented in scholarly endeavour. For the last, the possibility of finding unassailable evidence for this period is so remote that the demand remains unanswerable. The rejectionist school remains influential. De-mythologizing approaches have combined with those who seek explanation for the marvellous as literary devices. My approach grows out of this last. While not attempting the impossible task of verification, I seek to discern the nature and function of the marvellous with a mind open towards the possibility that the world view of the writer might have intellectual integrity. I will give examples of the various approaches so as to set the study in context.

### *1. Rejecting the historical reality of the marvellous*

Delehay(1905) set the foundation for 20th century methodology in regard to the study of hagiography.<sup>2</sup> His underlying attitude is encapsulated in the following quotation:

We have surely said enough to show how, among the people, the senses predominate over the intelligence, and how owing to the lethargy of their brains they are unable to rise to an ideal conception, but stop short at the matter, the image, the sound. It is furthermore by this spiritual feebleness that one must account for the blind attraction of the populace for the miraculous and the sensibly supernatural... the mysterious colloquies of the soul with God must be translated into palpable results in order to produce any impression on the popular mind. The supernatural is only impressive when combined with the marvellous. Hence it is that popular legends overflow with marvels.(49-50)

In other words, hagiographers act as the mouthpiece in writing the (vulgar) popular imagination's version of the legends of the saints. Platonic devaluation of the material over the spiritual sounds out clearly here. Intellectual scepticism about the miraculous became the orthodoxy of hagiographic study. Delehay's condemnation is not indiscriminate in that he does allow that some writers of saint's lives have been more faithful guardians of historical tradition. He distinguishes, 'a class of writers, possessing both literary power and the necessary information' whose narratives constitute authentic historical memoirs no less than works of edification, e.g. Sulpicius Severus, one of Adomnán's models. He says 'their writings must not be confused with the artificial productions of later periods, which affect at times to be

---

2 See Smith(1992)69; Aigrain(1953). Grégoire(1987) insists that the ultimate meaning of a hagiographic document lies below its surface, anterior to its particular historical details, 'and highlights 'the need to go beyond narrow textual criticism and positivistic historical reconstruction.'(20-1, 182, 208-9, 251).

inspired by them...' (60).

The profound influence of post enlightenment epistemology in the methodology of historical-criticism has thus tended to predispose modern historians to treat the stories of the marvellous with a wide degree of circumspection. Kenney (1968, 301) makes the *VC* something of an exception in its record of contemporary monastic, ecclesiastical and social practice, but does not differentiate its record of the marvellous from the generic form. Ó Briain (1947, 38) says, 'the Irish...loved to fill their annals with naive narrations...imagined by the credulous and simple medieval mind.' Anderson comments on the *VC* specifically:

About the supernatural powers of Columba, as described by Adomnán, there will be different opinions. But before forming any opinion, it is necessary to consider whether Adomnán's statements are evidence for the facts involved. The historian is entitled to require at least as good evidence for less credible phenomena as he would for matters of everyday experience.<sup>3</sup>

Their conclusion is that Adomnán had too little genuine tradition to keep him from falling back on other sources such as his 'own experience and training in the doctrine and practice of the Irish church.' This caution, taken with their presentation of Adomnán's methodology, suggests scepticism on their part regarding the *possibility* of the marvellous having any foundation in historical reality. McCone (1984, 26) repeats the same formula: the thaumaturgical section of the *VSM* 'contains episodes scarcely credible by modern standards', and, 'no scholar of the present or fairly recent past would be likely to be fooled into accepting the more bizarre features of even the oldest extant Lives at face value' (46). Hillgarth identifies this same ambivalence with regard to one of Adomnán's major influences:

Many historians would agree with Gustavo Vinay that no discussion of early medieval culture can begin without considering Pope Gregory I...but...he continues to perplex historians...one can sense the embarrassment caused by a whole side of Gregory (which cannot be confined to the *Dialogues*) that it has seemed kindest to dismiss as "naïve".<sup>4</sup>

Thus the supernatural and eschatological features of Gregory's thought are regarded as irrational in the modern age, and have been dealt with by dismissal as not genuinely Gregorian. Such devices have applied equally to our otherwise respectable Adomnán. Sharpe (1995, 3) writes: 'Many modern readers find such stories of miracles difficult to accept or believe.' He illustrates by citing the 8th Duke of Argyll who, at the turn of this century, questioned whether *Adomnán* believed in the miracles he wrote about or whether he resorted to 'deliberate invention'. The Duke rejects, 'the substance of the

3 A&A (1961) 19

4 Fontaine and Hillgarth (1992) 214.

book, the argument for Columba's sanctity... as: "childish and utterly incredible."

The approach does not admit the possibility of miracle in the sense of an event which does not follow the normal laws of 'nature'. This value-laden response has been the one operative in 'orthodox' historiography of the last century in relation to hagiographic documents. While nothing less than scrupulously orthodox in requirement, scepticism, and conclusion, the statements do not address the question of credibility within-the-tradition being studied, and may make unhistorical assumptions about what is 'everyday' in the seventh century by the standards of the mid 20th century. A major question they leave untouched is whether Adomnán's training 'in the doctrine and practice of the Irish church' did in fact include an understanding, acceptance and practice of prophecy, miracles and visions?

Thus a usually undeclared presupposition is identified. It rejects *a priori* the objective possibility of the occurrence of phenomena which actually did take place, and which did so as a result of the mechanisms described. Thus the marvellous aspects of this genre of extraordinarily popular literature is the product of human imagination. It is built upon a tissue of insubstantial commonplace folk-tales that themselves ultimately derive from the fertile imaginations of superstitious, primitive folk. The presupposition renders any putative belief of the author in the phenomena manifestly false, and thus requires the modern interpreter to seek alternative explanations for the phenomena. Otherwise respected early writers are rescued from charges of naive credulity by identifying political and other motives for which they employ the marvels, as we will see. The approach thus opens the interpreter to the possibility of missing an important key both to understanding the spiritual understanding of the writer, of his audience, of the evidence to hand, and in a wider application, to understanding how things actually may be.

## 2. *Historico-critical or allegorical interpretations*

Rejection of miracle as a real category thus leads to an approach which accepts the marvellous as literary devices employed by Adomnán for particular purpose(s), while implicitly rejecting real occurrence. J.N.Hillgarth records the prevailing tradition of dismissal of hagiographies as sources for historical knowledge in the Merovingian context, as espoused by Wallace-Hadrill and his predecessors. His statement could be seen as equally applicable in the present study. While acknowledging the drawbacks, he states,

My own view is that these works should not, in general, be dismissed as artificial in nature and utilitarian in aim. They appear to express interests and feelings not limited



to professional "cult-builders" (if one may coin the phrase) but shared by the local community as a whole. A more basic objection to these lives -- one often raised in the past -- that, because of the miracles which fill most of them, they are valueless (in Bruno Krusch's succinct phrase, "kirchliche Schwindelliteratur"), is not so liable to be heard today. The use of modern anthropological studies has helped us... we are just beginning to glimpse how, through these lives, we can hope to enter into the "mental universe" of the time, how they can introduce us, as no other source can do, to the religion (that is the interpretation of the world and of the place of God and man in it) which was available to seventh-century man.<sup>5</sup>

Rehabilitation of the VC responding to the first part of this methodology has identified three major purposes or motives that Adomnán may have had in his 'mental universe' which may have led to his presenting the marvellously accompanied Columba in the way that he does.

*a. Proving sanctity:*

Anderson stands firmly in the tradition of Delehaye:

[The biographer of a saint's] special function was to prove the sanctity of the person whose life he wrote. Sanctity meant the merit that God rewarded with miracles, and therefore it was necessary for Adomnán to devote his book to miraculous occurrences.<sup>6</sup>

Smyth takes up the theme:

His task was to tell good miracle stories which would reinforce the belief already established in men's minds that Columba was a saint...Columba's sanctity was the central point at issue in Adomnán's work.<sup>7</sup>

Smyth is bothered by the lack of miracles for the 42 years of Columba's life spent in Ireland, a remarkable point, he says, which 'cannot be explained away' in view of Adomnán's central aim. He suggests the absence is simply due to there being little such information in circulation that Cumméne and Adomnán could relate.<sup>8</sup> Sharpe concurs: 'with the exception of the passages in which Adomnán mentions these teachers (i.e. Finnbar / Uinniau (ii1), Gemmán (ii25) and Cruithnechán (iii2)), no authority exists for any statement relating to the first forty or so years of Columba's life.'<sup>9</sup> Sharpe sees Adomnán's implicit belief in the call of Columba into the church

<sup>5</sup> Hillgarth(1987)315-6.

<sup>6</sup> A&A(1961)18

<sup>7</sup> Smyth(1984)85, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Smyth (1984) 89.

<sup>9</sup> Sharpe(1995) 12. Sharpe does not detail which stories he alludes to here, so it is difficult to pursue his suggestion with any precision, or to judge the criteria by which he makes the distinction. I am assuming that he does not refer to stories which claim a pre-peregrination setting, which I will be treating as this investigation progresses.

from birth as surprising; the lack of a 'conversion' tradition 'odd to the modern mind'. He explains it as indicative of Adomnán's lack of interest in a chronological account of Columba's life, and by reference to its parallel in Cogitosus where Brigit is presented as holy from birth. It is later sources that present their heroes rejecting their pagan origins for the baptism into Christ.<sup>10</sup>

However, if the gospel account of Christ is Adomnán's primary model of sanctity, no surprise is necessary. Adomnán was presenting the view that Columba was holy throughout his life just as their mutual master, Christ, was himself holy throughout his life. With this as his conscious model, we should not expect Adomnán to see the need to furnish a conversion story, especially if the historical circumstance, and the received tradition did not provide such. The model may, as Picard(1985, 78) observes, owe something to classical biography. That later hagiographers found the need to include such a regular feature of their lives is no reason to suspect Adomnán, in his earlier location, of fabrication in not including such. This gap in Adomnán's record is perhaps a significant factor in our interpreting Adomnán's purpose in writing the *Life*, and far from needing to be 'explained away', actually furnishes a major clue towards understanding. What we may observe with some confidence here is that either the traditional concept of Columba's supernatural ministry, or Adomnán's selective record of the tradition, or indeed both accounts, see the miraculous as properly beginning with his peregrination to Iona, and not before. The tradition, as inherited by Adomnán was thus in this view of a ministry which though pre-figured, in a similar way to which the apocryphal gospels prefigure the Messianic ministry of Christ in his boyhood miracles, was not memorable for its mirabilia until the move to Iona. Adomnán's focus was on Columba's marvellously accredited apostleship, and he built his account of Columba as a modern type of Jesus who began his own marvellously accompanied public ministry after his baptism in the Jordan, and what we might term his 'peregrination' in the Judean desert. The gospel record is itself sparing with regard to annunciatory and natal mirabilia.<sup>11</sup> A lesser, but no less important model is Moses, whose miracles begin after he leaves his earthly inheritance as Pharaoh's adopted grandson to follow the call of God (Ex.2).

Herbert(1988, 138) sees Adomnán's fundamental attitude being a 'conviction that his subject was a man of God', as based on his own reported experience of the saint's

---

10 Sharpe(1995)10

11 Matthew records only the conception (Mt 1.18), Joseph's dreams (1.20f, 2.13f, 19f, 22), and the natal star (1.2ff), and Luke the angelic annunciation (Lk 1.26ff); the foetal baptist's greeting (1.41f); angelic birth-announcement (2.9ff), and Simeon & Anna's prophetic revelations (2.26ff; 36ff).

posthumous intervention, reports which Herbert sees as extending the tradition into a new era. Secondly, he has 'internalized the portrayal of sanctity' of his exemplars to the extent of both interpreting Ionan tradition by their models, and also possibly fashioning his own action by the same. From this link she infers her major thesis:

that Adomnán intended that his work should link Columban monastic tradition with the mainstream of Western hagiography, so that it should affirm that Colum Cille, venerated as a saint by his own community, merited acknowledgement also as a member of the communion of saints of Christendom.<sup>12</sup>

Picard(1984, 172-5) also notes that Adomnán may have had a continental audience in mind, wanting to place Columba 'on the record' as it were, alongside Columbanus and the many other Merovingian saints. Sharpe confirms that Adomnán wrote for other monasteries in the Ionan *familia*, possibly even Lindisfarne,<sup>13</sup> to inform them about their founder, about monastic devotion, about the dependence of kings on the church, and to assert Columba's position alongside the growth of the cults of Patrick and Brigit in Ireland, and of Cuthbert in Northumbria.

The seventh century Lives of St Patrick made extravagant claims for his power, his property and his jurisdiction, which Adomnán did not confront or challenge. His approach is less arrogant, more subtle. He is without question more spiritual in his biblical and his monastic understanding of the saint, and he is more international in his approach to depicting Columba as a saint in the mould of St Martin, St Antony and St Benedict.<sup>14</sup>

With Herbert, Sharpe suggests that Adomnán sought to present Columba in three proofs as a man of God 'in a mould that was both biblical and universal.'<sup>15</sup> He 'was concerned to present St Columba to his readers as the equal of those continental saints whose lives were widely read,' most obviously, Antony, Martin and Benedict. He also mentions Adomnán's homiletic appeal in ii32 to equality with the prophets and apostles, and Adomnán's presentation of Columba as sharing in the society of angels, showing his place in the heavenly kingdom.<sup>16</sup>

Closely related to this is Sharpe's opinion that Adomnán's major purpose was to attest

---

12 Herbert(1988)138.

13 We might also add Wearmouth and Jarrow, founded c.674 and 682 by St Benedict Biscop, who was born in Northumberland c.628, spent his youth in the Northumbrian court, became a monk of Lérins and died at Wearmouth c.689, and who we must assume was under influence of Iona in his early life after 635.

14 Sharpe(1995)63 does not accept that the Iona had lost the allegiance of the Uí Neill to Armagh, nor that Adomnán was thus seeking special favour from Dalriada; he believes Adomnán is simply wanting to present Columba as able to stand *alongside* Patrick.

15 Sharpe(1995)59.

16 Sharpe(1995)57-58. This reference to kingdom is important to note as we progress; see chap.3.

Columba's miracles rather than seeking to make 'historical' sense.<sup>17</sup> A part of this process is perhaps an intention to record the continuation of God's dealings with men through chosen servants, as in the past. This itself is a vital component of the Judao-Christian tradition of which Adomnán was consciously an heir. Julia Smith has called for the discovery of a new alembic in which to refine a deeper understanding of what these writers perceived as sanctity. This would plumb the depths of Gregory of Tours' question, 'should we say the life or the lives of the saints?' It would seek a common essence shared by its varied manifestations; its timeless standards; a distillation of the distinguishing factors forming putative degrees of sanctity.

'What should it be,' she says, '... We might start by giving greater thought to the reasoning which informed Gregory's answer to his own question, that, "there is a diversity of virtues and merits among [the saints], but the one life of the body sustains them all in this world". If saints are those who reflect a Christ-like holiness in their life or the manner of their death, what notion of holiness could produce manifestations as variegated as did the early Middle Ages? ... Early medieval hagiography has benefited enormously from the recent spate of work on hagiographers as authors... That, however, does not obviate the need to move beyond text and context in search of a meaning, authority and relevance which plumbs the depth of Gregory's question.'<sup>18</sup>

It is this search in which we engage.

*b. Political function of the marvellous:*

Proof of sanctity, as well as being an end in itself, may also act as a foundation for other purposes. One major function commonly now identified is its place in giving authority to political activity and propaganda.

i. Adomnán's authority. Smyth believes Adomnán seeks to establish his own credentials as leader of the Ionan ecclesia, linking himself strongly with the famous Columba who is favoured in God's eyes. Thus opposition is unwise. He shows Columba's and therefore his own impartiality as to kings and earthly kingdoms.<sup>19</sup> He thus writes to prepare the ground for his *Lex Innocentium*. Herbert (1988, 51) concurs,<sup>20</sup> highlighting the royal connections of Adomnán, as a son of the ruling Cenél Connaill family of Sétna, son of Fergus. Adomnán's fourth cousin Loingsech mac Oengusso acceded to the Uí Néill over kingship of Tara in 696. 'It is

17 Sharpe (1995)60, though of course this is the standard means of affirming sanctity in the genre.

18 Smith (1992)76, which also contains Smith's description of the optative still.

19 Smyth (1984)92. Again, the reference to kingdom is important to note, see chap.3.

20 Herbert (55) usefully shows the support Adomnán was able to gather from the secular rulers of Uí Néill, Northumbria, Dal Riata and Pictland, as well as ecclesiastical support from his competitors at Armagh. Though his establishing the law was undoubtedly a coup for himself and Iona's prestige, the material and moderating benefits were not only to his own *familia*.



understandable, then, that he should exploit the close links between the country's leading secular ruler and the successor of Colum Cille, in order to advance the position of the saint's *familia*'.<sup>21</sup>

ii. To counter the propaganda of other Irish cults. Cogitosus champions Kildare.<sup>22</sup> Muirchu and Tirechán assert Patrician supremacy (i.e. that of Armagh and the Uí Néill) in Ireland, and claim jurisdiction over Columban foundations. Picard(1982, 171f.) follows Binchy in accusing the Patrician biographers of buying protection from Uí Néill by writing documents of historical fabrication to prove the historical validity of Uí Néill claims, and believes Adomnán does the same with Dalriada. There seems little evidence to support this claim; Smyth's note of VC impartiality seems a more satisfactory account for the evidence.

Herbert finds no evidence to support the view that it was the Columban paruchia,<sup>23</sup> the continental church,<sup>24</sup> nor Armagh or Kildare that Adomnán had in mind. She calls the most important aspect of the achievement of Columba that, 'his career may be seen to have shown the potential for mutual benefit arising out of co-operation between church and dynasty.'<sup>25</sup> We can interpret from this that she sees Adomnán's purpose in writing as he did as being to present this achievement on both sides of the Irish Sea, and to further its development in his own time.<sup>26</sup> She shows, citing the guarantor list and Ionan source of *Lex Innocentium* that Iona was in the dominant position in Ireland at the end of the seventh century, and that the seventh century Patrician and Brigidian hagiographers directed their competing propaganda towards gaining their own influence. Abbot Ségéne presided over an expansion into the Southern Uí Néill territory of Brega, where Rechra was established in 635. It was thus in his, and Iona's interest to promote the repute of their patron in writing, and it was from his hagiographical activity with his nephew Cumméne that Adomnán derived his major source.<sup>27</sup> The brief quotation of this source in Dorbbéne's manuscript shows its

---

21 Herbert(1988)51.

22 McCone(1984)30 regards the aggrandising tendency in the VC, shown in 128a and 135a/b as 'far less prominent' than in Cogitosus.

23 'It is difficult to concur with the opinion that the Columban familia in Adomnán's day felt its position threatened... and urged the composition of the *Vita Columbae* as "the master-work which would raise morale".' 146 (referring to Picard(1982a)172). This is based on Iona's evident strength as indicated by *Cáin Adomnán*, the lack of claim to status or property in the VC, and clear evidence of the promotion of Columba in Ireland in seventh century eulogies (147).

24 Adomnán's statement on European publication 'is a borrowed rhetorical flourish' (145).

25 Herbert(1988)35.

26 Herbert(1988)13-25 & 13.

27 Herbert(1988)18, 24-5.

author's interest in continuing the propagation of Cenél Conaill interests.<sup>28</sup> Herbert notes that Adomnán used his connection with Aldfrith to secure the release of Uí Néill prisoners from Northumbria, and asserted through VC the divine approval of Uí Néill high kingship. Armagh apparently felt this success keenly, as the claims of Patrick's propagandists show.<sup>29</sup> The competition hardly raises Adomnán's explicit interest. In his only mention of Patrick, he seems rather to suggest peaceful coexistence of the two familia: 'The fields of our two monasteries, mine and his, will be separated by the width of one small hedge'.<sup>30</sup> However this reference to Patrick's field may hide a reference to 2Cor.10.12-18. The context of the verse is Paul's acerbic defence of his ministry against competing forces.

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves...neither do we go beyond *our* limits by boasting of work done by others...for we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory...it is not the man who commends himself who is approved, but the man whom the Lord commends. (2 Cor 10.12, 15, 16b, 18)

It is difficult to resist suggesting that these words are in his mind as a barely disguised rebuke to the ambitions of Armagh as published by Tirechán, busy claiming churches not founded by Patrick.

Sharpe in contrast suggests that Adomnán has arranged his material to give precedence to the Cenél nGabráin Dalriadic succession over that of the Uí Néill, and thus supporting a shift in allegiance for Iona from the latter, who supplied the first nine abbots, to the former (1995, 27-8). He suggests that Adomnán is directing his citations of Áedán mac Gabráin, king of Scottish Dalriada, to a Dalriadic audience who already perceived Áedán's importance (n.84). Adomnán is either stressing Iona's role in the history of the kingdom or reminding the incumbents of Iona's consequent present authority and claim of influence, in framing his descriptions of Columba's dealing with the famous ancestor of the kingdom in the way he does. Sharpe rejects any basis for the suggestion that Iona was losing the support of Uí Néill to Armagh, (62-3) and that in consequence, Adomnán was writing to seek the special favour of Dalriada. He cites Adomnán's own co-operation with the Uí Néill High king over the *Lex Innocentium*, in which the first guarantor was the bishop of Armagh, with Muirchú far down the list. He concedes, 'It is certainly probable that he meant to

---

28 Herbert(1988)43.

29 Herbert(1988)54, cites Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, SS18(1), 22(1), pp.138, 140. This should read SS18(2-4), 22(4).

30 VC(2nd pref)3a. The monasteries referred to are not identified; Sharpe surmises the reference is to adjacent holdings known to Adomnán (Sharpe (1995)n.12). The ref.to field may be significant in another way. See p.183 below.

present a portrait of St Columba that could stand alongside that of Patrick.'

iii. Northumbria: Picard sees restoring the reputation of Iona after the Synod of Whitby as the first purpose of the VC. He supports this view with reference to the many seventh century Irish ecclesiastical canons being promulgated at the time in an attempt to re-establish Irish authority; the introduction of the *Lex Innocentium* of Adomnán; and the proliferation of Saints' Lives from the period (1982, 166f). He sees Adomnán writing in response to pressure from the Angles in the establishment of Cuthbert's cultus, and from the taunting of Wilfrid of York, against which he asserted Columba's likeness to the apostles Peter, John and Paul in virtue, both of power and holy life (1984, 172-5). Herbert suggests that Ségéne, Abbot of Iona 623-652, and Cumméne, Abbot 657-669, the first [known] Ionan hagiographers, were strongly motivated by this factor. It was during Ségéne's rule that Iona established Lindisfarne, invited soon after the Northumbrian victory of the once fugitive Oswald in 634. The non-roman Easter which Iona celebrated had been defended strongly by Ségéne against the (Irish) synod of Mag Léne (ca.630), and even, according to Bede, against Pope John IV (1988, 40-41). Adomnán's monks needed reassurance that in adopting the computus of the universal Easter which he brought from Northumbria, Adomnán was not thereby abandoning Ségéne's legacy, and veneration of Iona's founder.<sup>31</sup> In 664, after three pioneering decades, Iona had ceded her control of her once flourishing Northumbrian daughter church, which led to the adoption of 'a defiant and somewhat embattled position in regard to the customs of its beloved founder.'<sup>32</sup> This left a perception on Iona of Northumbrian doubt of their patron's repute and orthodoxy, and of the strength of his link with the 'generality of sainthood'(144). Herbert believes Adomnán to have detected Northumbrian ambivalence on his visits to the east coast in 685-7.<sup>33</sup> He wished to make clear his continued devotion to Columba despite his adoption of universal observance. Thus he produced his defence of the saint whom he believed ranked with the greatest of Christendom. He employed the conventions of contemporary hagiography, i.e. the accrediting power of the marvellous.

31 It is perhaps one of the most remarkable features of this Life that Adomnán did not use the opportunity to openly claim direct succession to himself which would assert his own authority in the face of his monks' disobedience over the Easter dating question then in contention, nor does he use the opportunity to complain of this disobedience.

32 Herbert(1988)45. I use the term daughter-church here carefully, recognising the lack of resolution over the question of the status of episcopally governed Lindisfarne, but extending Sharpe's idea of the 'Mother/Minster-church'. (see Sharpe(1984&92)*passim*).

33 Though his ambassadorial success in releasing the Bregan hostages in AU686 suggests a not insubstantial reputation, aided though he was by his friendship with Aldfrith.

Herbert confirms Picard's view that Adomnán reminded Northumbria of their debt to Colum Cille's church for their faith, but does not respond to the suggestion of competition with Cuthbert (145). VC not only affirmed existing Columban hagiography, but added to it both Adomnán's own testimony of continued patronal influence, and, in Herbert's opinion, a collection of more acceptable sanctity-affirming tales from outwith Iona itself, thus enhancing the existing repute.<sup>34</sup> In showing Columba as one with the universal church, he emphasised his sanctity and ongoing intervention depended not on ritual observance,<sup>35</sup> but on universal qualities and qualifications. Thus in changing observance, the monks would not be denying their patron's holiness, or status, but would be uniting with the church of which Columba was a clear first ranking companion. Thus the VC is designed to 'restore perspective'.<sup>36</sup> Similarly Sharpe draws attention to Adomnán's point that although Columba's popular reputation had widely spread, the details of his life were not similarly known, and that it was Adomnán's intent to correct this lack.<sup>37</sup>

However, Adomnán only refers to Northumbria twice: i1, probably written after the main body of the Life, almost in afterthought; and in ii46, mentioning his own two visits to Northumbria in the context of his discussion of posthumous protection.. He makes nothing of the exile of Oswald and his twelve men, except to say it was 'among the Irish'. He fails to make an opportunity to mention Columba's vicarious mission to Northumbria through Aidan. He writes three decades after Colman's retiral from Lindisfarne, and two decades into his own abbacy, a long delay. This series of missed opportunities must leave a question mark hanging over this proposition.

iv. Pictland. Eleven of the tales (including the summary i1, and i37c) contain material

---

34 Herbert believes the 'Cumméne' stratum of tales have been shown to be only 'invested with the hue of the supernatural' rather than 'overtly miraculous' (139). This view is dependant on numerous assumptions, i.e. that the Cumméne stratum is identified by tales containing contemporary historical 'fulfillments' to which a fabricated prophecy is posthumously attached (135); that the concern of the earlier hagiographer was as much to make the tales comment on contemporary events, as with recording the deeds of the founder (136); that none of the 'overtly miraculous' tales which Adomnán does record were derived from Cumméne; that none of the tales from outwith Iona were derived from Cumméne. Many of this last group could properly have been communicated to the *seniores* of Iona by members of the travelling companions of Columba, or by members of monasteries/ communities from the place of occurrence. e.g. his prophetic knowledge at Trevet is observed by *commilitiones* (i40).

35 She says(143) 'He describes his own personal experiences of Colum Cille's intervention, linking them with accounts of similar manifestations to the monks of the saint's own day, and indicating that in all cases the mediation of the saint did not depend on adherence to particular customs, but on prayer and devotion.' She does not say what these accounts were, nor what the customs were.

36 Herbert(1988)144 and 147-8, 'guiding both sides to a more constructive view of the situation, one focusses on the central figure of Colum Cille, whose sanctity is confirmed by supernatural signs'.

37 Sharpe(1995)note 5 on the first preface.



relating to Pictland, and of these there is a single reference relating to the continuity of the church in Pictland in the intervening century (ii46). Again, Adomnán's does not seem to take the opportunity to emphasise the historical importance of Columba and Iona in the foundation of the (northern) Pictish church. Given the attention Adomnán does give to Pictland, especially compared with that given to Northumbria, we might discern Adomnán being motivated by foresight of problems ahead. Adomnán may be posited as asserting the position of Iona as the progenitor of Pictish Christianity in relation to Northumbrian oversight of the church there in his day. The case is weak for lack of Adomnán's clarity over the conversion process (see chap 5 below). If it was Adomnán's project to reassert Columban history, however tentative, and to bolster Ionan authority in Pictland, it fails in 717 as Nechtan expels the Ionan clergy 'beyond the *Dorsum Britanniae*'.

v. Márkus has recently expounded his view that Adomnán differentiated between geopolitical areas in his reporting of nature miracles associated with animals.<sup>38</sup> Noticing the political significance of the crane story as a link with the dynasty of Columba/Adomnán, Márkus refers to three Scottish geographical spaces in Adomnán's mental map: Firstly Pictland saw confrontation with the *Magi*; a boar which he saw as a cultic reference;<sup>39</sup> and the water beast in a hostile environment. Secondly, in Dalriada, where we are among Columba's protégés who gave him land (according to AU) and where Columba became patron, animals are treated differently. The hungry are fed with Salmon; two herds are multiplied following hospitality; a stake provides food and a surplus for sale; and a bull is revealed as bewitched. Márkus notes that all of these occur in the north, in Cenél Loairn, and may reinforce claims of Adomnán as abbot with political significance. Thirdly, on Iona incidents show an unnatural harmony between Columba and animals. Snakes are prevented from harming other creatures;<sup>40</sup> a knife is blunted (ii29); the weeping horse (iii23)., Thus the benefit of rule under godly authority is demonstrated. The unmistakable eschatological reference to the medieval concept of the monastery as a 'heaven on earth',<sup>41</sup> may also be showing the benign paternal care of the abbot demonstrating the

38 Gilbert Márkus: 'Monks and pastors and missionaries,' Paper given at the Sixth Annual SCHA Conference, Edinburgh 1997.

39 as had Picard (1981, 99). Ross (1986, 130) suggests the boar was an important cultic animal, and a dangerous, fearsome hunting quarry. Perhaps a symbol of evil strength representing Pictish paganism?

40 ii28, iii23. This implies that he prevents snakes from catching prey. (see chap 3 below).

41 See Macdonald (1997, 33) 'Adomnán seems sure, indeed, that a monk's heavenly life also is lived with his community: monastic profession has explicitly an eternal dimension.' This statement is made without supporting evidence from the VC. Markus suggests this harmony is an eschatological reference to swords beaten into ploughshares (see chapter 3 below).

presence of God.

From i1, though not an animal miracle, we might add Northumbria as a fourth mental space. Taking the animal miracles in isolation from others is problematic however. Pictland also saw healings and resuscitation. The environment was spiritually hostile because of its paganism, thus we should expect signs of spiritual warfare here (Eph 6). VC shows, confirmed by archaeological evidence, that Ionan monks ate various animals, used leather, and even close-tethered a goat (MacDonald 1997, 56-60). One such tale, with reference to pigs fattened for the table (ii23) concerns a Pictish noble in exile under Columba's protection. He is murdered by Columba's appointed warden on the appointed refuge of Islay. Thus we have a Dal Riadan rebelling against Columba's authority whilst on Ionan business, and the victim is a Pictish noble. The Dal Riadan animal miracles are joined by other examples of serious human sinfulness (persecutors, thief, raid), though are themselves used as examples of eschatologically significant signs of the blessings of the kingdom, for which, see chapter 3. Thus Adomnán's mental spaces may not be so clearly delimited.

Having summarised scholarly opinion regarding political motive in the VC, the comments of Julia M.H. Smith are worth bearing in mind:

These comments might be taken to suggest that in the hands of early medieval writers, the *vita* became a form of political literature. It would be fairer to say that recent scholarly preoccupation with the hagiographer as an author working in a specific context can easily generate such an impression.<sup>42</sup>

*c. Adomnán the Teacher.*<sup>43</sup>

Bede describes Columba as first teacher of the Northern Picts.<sup>44</sup> Anderson makes the point:

It seems that next to the object of extolling his predecessor, Adomnán is in this work inspired by a desire to instruct his readers in what they should believe, and what they ought to do. He was an abbot, and did not forget his obligations to his community. In every contestable matter that he touches upon his words pronounce his own opinion, expressed by him as a teacher. Apparently-casual remarks were intended to influence his

42 Smith(1992)71. Although Smith is reviewing a much wider period and geographical setting than our own, her comment returns relevance here.

43 A&A (1961)24ff, and see O'Reilly(1997)106, where she summarises her paper as showing Adomnán as a teacher of scriptural exegesis through the life of Columba, and of the 'fear of the Lord' as the beginning of wisdom in particular.

44 A&A (1961)87, and see MacDonald(1997)34 for a brief description of Irish teacher-student activity.

monks, and we must take them seriously.<sup>45</sup>

They go on to cite the following teaching elements; the place of bishops, the Sabbath, consequences of sinful behaviour such as dissension. Thus the writer's focus is on the monastic community in contradistinction to the description of journeys or missionary enterprise.<sup>46</sup> Smyth agrees.<sup>47</sup> However, the list is noteworthy for its lacunae; the authority of the abbot, and of the presbyter; ascetic lifestyle; the place of work, prayer, reading etc.

Was Adomnán writing to help his readers to be better monks; to follow the rule more faithfully; to develop their ascetic self-discipline? It may be argued that this is a background element in *VC*, but it is hardly the main theme.<sup>48</sup> Adomnán deliberately records marvellous manifestations which were believed to be accompaniments to the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>49</sup> Are they really only being used here in accreditation of ethical holiness; as encouragement towards coenobitic asceticism? It must be possible that the teacher might also be communicating, albeit implicitly, his views on the functional place of the marvellous in the life of any holy Christian. If so, what are we able to learn of the contemporary attitude to the marvellous and its place in ordinary Christian life as it could be received by his monks. At the close of his account of the political function of *VC*, Picard(1982)177 mentions the possibility that 'it is likely that Adomnán's primary aim was to write what he saw as a faithful account of the life of Columba, which could serve as a model for the Christians of his time.' He thus accepts this as a possible function of the life.

Hillgarth(1992, 228) reminds us that Gregory of Tours saw the Christian hold over Gaul remaining fragile; could this too be detected in Adomnán's writing for Ireland/Dalriada, and therefore be part of the reason for writing as he does? In an important epilogue to his paper on the pagan origin of *VC* i.47, Picard(1989, 368f.) suggests this more subtle didactic intent and approach. Overturning Ó Briain's rejection of Irish censorship of pagan saga,<sup>50</sup> he suggests that missionary Christians engaged in a process of replacing pagan religious belief and practice, particularly in the critical areas of cosmology and eschatology. The beliefs and symbolic ritual which

---

45 A&A (1961)24.

46 A&A(1961)86 cf p24b.

47 Smyth(1984)85, and see Sharpe(1995), and MacDonald (1984 &1997).

48 MacDonald(1997)24.

49 See Herbert(1988, 140), 'From his hagiographical reading, Adomnán no doubt was familiar with the convention that miraculous signs assisted the process of conversion of a heathen people.' She notes the final sentence of *VC*i34

50 Mac Cana(1986)57-74 shows, in contrast to Ó Briain, that there is evidence for censorship of pagan saga, but see chapter 2 below.

manifests these beliefs were 'a prime target'. Those associated with death, as 'the core of christian eschatology', 'had to be replaced'. In i47, Adomnán reduces a commonplace kingly death myth to a minor historical tale and transfers the supernatural element to the Christian saint who prophesies the death. The emphasis is on the prophecy fulfilled. Picard makes a persuasive case for the 'juxtaposition' and 'intermingling' of pagan and Christian motifs here, and his identification of Adomnán's purpose being to replace pagan death ritual symbolism, and pagan 'paranature', as he calls it, with Christian eschatological categories and Christian supernature is attractive. He grants to Adomnán a great subtlety: infiltrating, insinuating, subversively weaving Christian theology into a well-known pagan folk motif, and thereby eclipsing and eventually replacing the original meaning. The tale has been de-mythologized and used as a didactic tool to aid the conversion of the pagans.

The attractive scheme is not, however, without its problems. The tale openly acknowledges the ambient tenaciousness of pagan magic,<sup>51</sup> and makes no attempt, subtle or otherwise, to place the practitioner under judgement, nor to demonstrate its deceit (as in ii.17), nor its eclipse by more powerful magic. No Christian eschatology, with the possible exception of the prophetic activity, nor cosmology, is introduced. Picard does not demonstrate what pagan eschatology was replaced. Nor is it clear what pagan supernatural element is transferred; we only observe the Christian element in place. In imputing subtle craft to Adomnán, the theory makes him a cunning fabricator, not simply an author making the best of a garbled legend. Nevertheless, Picard's suggestion that a purpose of the hagiographer was to acquaint his readers with Christian eschatology and super-natural belief and practice as part of a mission to convert the pagans is worth pursuing.<sup>52</sup>

O'Reilly(1997) takes the eschatological theme further, showing Adomnán's considerable learning brought to bear upon the task of teaching his readers 'the fear of the Lord', 'the revelation of the continuing meaning of God's word for the believer.' Through spiritual exegesis in the *lectio divina* tradition, Adomnán expounds scripture in his account of the very life of Columba himself. 'Adomnán, like Báithíne had succeeded to Columba's role as teacher...Instead of quoting Columba's exegesis on particular passages, he shows how the saint exemplified their precepts.'(106) In so

---

51 *maleficium*, sorcery, or poison used by sorcerers (Souter). Whether this makes Gúaire's wife a sorceress, or a regular user of sorcery is not told. Sorcery is, however, not portrayed as having been superceded.

52 (see chapter 3 below).



describing the function of the VC, O'Reilly helpfully infers that it has the nature of a carefully and learnedly composed didactic treatise of biblical exegesis – we might call it hagiographical variations on a theme of biblical eschatology. She might also hint that the actual life of Columba was itself seen as a living interpretation, a living out, of biblical revelation. The VC would thus be Adomnán's attempt to record this praxis as a didactic example of its possibility.<sup>53</sup> O'Reilly's acute observations form a significant stimulus and background to the present investigation.

### 3. *Cautious openness*

Having summarised interpretations of the marvellous in VC as literary devices, we go on to examine the beliefs of seventh century Christians regarding the nature and function of these marvels in practice.

#### a. *Recognising the validity of early beliefs*

The demythologizing 'orthodoxy' described above has not held the field unchallenged. An approach which recognises the subjectivity of adopting a purely rational approach to historical analysis, of uniform incredulity, has been emerging. Henry Chadwick implies recognition of this point, as well as a caution in applying it, in a comment regarding the more general approach to historical research:

Probably it is only partly fair to say that disagreements principally spring from the adoption of divergent value-systems, any of which can assert equal claims to hold the field.<sup>54</sup>

The translator of Sulpicius Severus, another of Adomnán's major influences, stands with feet on both sides of the debate, on the one hand desirous of accepting Martin's status as a wonder-worker, but troubled by extravagant excesses. In his introduction to the translation, Hoare reviews the debate over the question of Sulpicius' reliability as a recorder and transmitter of factual information, as of contemporary popular impressions and devotion pertaining to Martin, saying:

No biographer of his period was better qualified to write a truthful life of a contemporary saint, and no biographer of his period – we may almost say, of any period – has written a life more full of astounding prodigies.<sup>55</sup>

He speculates that God may have raised Martin as a pre-eminent miracle worker for the special purpose of establishing the faith in what was pagan Gaul, which was under the Franks to act as 'the corner-stone of Catholic Christendom during its formative

<sup>53</sup> As Patrick would have it from scripture, 'we who are the "epistle of Christ"...' *Conf* 1.4.

<sup>54</sup> H.Chadwick (1981)3.

<sup>55</sup> Hoare(1954)4.

period'.<sup>56</sup> However Hoare is troubled by the extravagance of the later works, suggesting :

...the result was to create for St Martin a second and a very vulnerable reputation by superimposing upon popular devotion a literary vogue. Worse still, Sulpicius fixed for centuries a hagiographic tradition that rates the anecdotes of wonder-working above spiritual portraiture, to the great detriment of our understanding of both the natural psychology and the supernatural spirituality of the saints...here and there we get delightful glimpses of a real person and occasionally, surely, of a real wonder-worker; but all the time we have to be making allowances for literary requirements and poses, which is not restful.<sup>57</sup>

Hoare acutely raises the question of the function of the marvellous in early Christian hagiography, in common cause with Hilary, Gregory, and Cassian who saw much earlier the danger of concentrating on the marvellous. However, with them, Hoare does not reject the possibility of 'supernatural spirituality' which means more than profound contemplative asceticism, as his wistful glimpsing of a 'real wonder-worker' shows. Meyvaert identifies the modern desire to separate history and hagiography on account of the miraculous content, criticising it in the case of the author of *HE* as 'trying to fit Bede into our own standard of scholarship.' Bede accepted the Fathers' acceptance of biblical miracles, was restrained in accepting contemporary phenomena, and thus treats the elements of his own time 'with discretion and good judgement.'<sup>58</sup> Sr Benedicta Ward, in her *Miracles and the Mediaeval Mind* states that a:

number and diversity of events were regarded as in some way miraculous not out of naivety but from a more subtle and complex view of reality than we possess.<sup>59</sup>

Picard notes the problems associated with using hagiographical material for historical purposes,<sup>60</sup> but questions the legitimacy of the marvellous being simply dismissed. He encapsulates the point:

While recognising the importance of the *Vita* as a major historical source for sixth and seventh century Ireland and Scotland, many historians hesitate to accept Adomnán's testimony when it contradicts Bede. The origin of this reticence seems to be a question of literary genres.<sup>61</sup>... 'The importance given to supernatural phenomena is bound to put off a modern rationalistic mind. However... I shall remind the reader of the

---

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* p.6.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* p.7.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Meyvaert, *Bede the Scholar*, 51-55, in Meyvaert(1977), IX.

<sup>59</sup> Ward(1982)2

<sup>60</sup> Picard(1984)51 note 8. Now conventional. He notes firstly the time lapse to writing and the lateness of many manuscripts, and the consequent need to treat the life as a source for the period of writing rather than its object; secondly the object of the writer to prove the saint's holiness by appeal to miracle, rather than to produce historiographic biography.

<sup>61</sup> Picard(1984)51.

complexity and scope of the range of possible realities for facts of subjective experience, an area which should also be studied.<sup>62</sup>

Sharpe takes the argument further referring to the 8th Duke of Argyll:

This attitude springs from his distaste for Adomnán's cast of mind, which revered holiness displayed in miracles. In his own day and with the life of a saint as his object, Adomnán could hardly have written a book that was not full of miracle stories, *for prophecy and miraculous powers were among the gifts of the Spirit [my italics]* (1Cor12.10). These were the proofs that Columba was a saint, so this was the heart of the life. Whether or not one wishes to believe that the events happened as told, they are true to the image of saint that was familiar throughout the seventh century.

though he retains an unresolved caution: '...None the less, in the nature of the case, there is a major problem of historical credibility.'<sup>63</sup> Part of this problem is the identification in sixth/seventh century of the operation of 'gifts of the Spirit.' (see chapter 5 below).

Berger warns that commentators should hesitate to venture opinions on the justification of particular beliefs. He concludes saying he has tried to show that :

...secularized consciousness is not the absolute it presents itself as... If the signals of transcendence have become rumours in our time, then we can set out to explore these rumours - and perhaps to follow them up to their source. A rediscovery of the supernatural will be, above all, a regaining of openness in our perception of reality.<sup>64</sup>

He calls for: 'an "infinite care" in the affairs of men to observe reactions to these phenomena.' This same care should be adopted in dealing with the account of a seventh century monk who claims to observe, albeit mostly at a distance, phenomena which modern scholarship has made itself unwilling to admit as sensible to awareness. I hope to 'explore these rumours' which Adomnán has deposited, seeking to test their congruence with his tradition, and to further improve our knowledge of the development of belief in such phenomena up to the seventh century insular context.

#### *b. Antique awareness of the doubtful veracity of the marvellous*

An important observation, missed in applying modern criteria to the analysis of the marvellous, is that the ancients themselves, despite their 'naïvety', commonly doubt

<sup>62</sup> Picard (1984)51 note 8.

<sup>63</sup> Sharpe(1995)4. Sharpe's statement here regarding the gifts belies numerous unresolved questions. Why, given the importance of Cassian to monasticism in general, Iona included, are his strictures on the use of miracle to signify holiness in Adomnán so at home with the practice. What is the connection between miracle and gifts of the Spirit? Did Adomnán have any such concept in mind? Did not these phenomena end with the death of the Apostles (as Chrysostom asserted (Kydd 1984). See cap 5.

<sup>64</sup> Berger(1969)19.



the veracity of reports of the marvellous. A few examples will illustrate the point: The *Amra* tells us that Columba read Basil. His younger brother, Gregory (c.330-c.395),<sup>65</sup> tells a story of a military officer who came to him soon after his sister Macrina's death and related a story of a miracle through her. The officer's daughter had a severe eye infection. Macrina prayed for her healing, and she was healed. The officer relates how in this healing he comprehended the miracles in the gospel which he had not believed before. Gregory comments:

most men judge the credibility of what they hear according to the measure of their own experience, and what is beyond the power of the hearer they insult with the suspicion of falsehood as outside of the truth ... there were other events...; the healing of disease, the casting out of devils, true prophecies of future events, all of which are believed to be true by those who knew the details accurately, amazing although they are. But for the material-minded, they are beyond what can be accepted.<sup>66</sup>

Gregory thus writes arguing for the occurrence of miracle, in the awareness that his readers will doubt the veracity unless they have personal experience. Greek rational scepticism was an important strand of thought in the early Christian world. Patrick refuses to deny signs and wonders granted to him because of incredulity of his detractors (*Conf* 45). Gregory I is cited as accepting miracles in missionary situations, but only in a spiritual sense in established situation, e.g. Turner (1996, 289), O'Reilly (1997, 95). However, McCready (1994) has recently shown that Gregory I maintained belief in and expectation of the presence and practice of miracles. Adomnán himself is still aware of this doubting tendency:

The credibility of miracles of this kind, that happened in past times and that we have not seen, is confirmed for us beyond doubt by those of the present day, that we ourselves have observed. (ii.45)<sup>67</sup>

Thus the practice of dismissing early writers as uniformly naïve and credulous must be questioned. Historians, as we have seen, are increasingly recognising their need to 'get into the minds' of their subjects who lived with very different world-views. This coincides with a growth amongst theologians and within the church of interest in, and claimed experience of, just the sort of phenomena of which Adomnán wrote.

65 Modern scholars have assessed him as surpassing Basil and Gregory Nazianzus as philosopher and theologian, being more learned and profound, possibly the most versatile theologian of his century. (V. Woods Callahan (1967) ix.).

66 Gregory of Nyssa. *Life of St. Macrina*, tr. Virginia Woods Callahan, in: *Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Ascetical Works*. The Fathers of the Church series, Vol. 58, (Catholic University of America Press, 1967) 190-191. I am grateful to R.A. Baker for pointing me to this reference. (tr. from Callahan's edition. The Life has a published edition by Pierre Maraval, SC 178, (Paris, Éditions du Cerf 1971)).

67 *Praetereorum nobis quae non uidimus talium miraculorum praesentia quae ipsi perspeximus fidem indubitanter confirmant.* VC 99b.

Adomnán may well have been perfectly at ease with idea of divine intervention. We reject this possible seventh century opinion in anachronistic imputation of modern epistemology, and thereby risk missing the opportunity to observe the phenomena as Adomnán did.

c. During the latter part of this century, this more open approach has begun to affect scholarship in the field. Gilbert Márkussays the VC's description may be: 1. a real revelation of 6th century life; 2. how Adomnán thinks things were then; 3. revelations of how things were at the close of the seventh century; 4. prescriptive of how Adomnán would have liked things to be in his own time. A combination of the four is, of course, a fifth possibility. Meek recognises that the Christians of Adomnán's day shared a 'scriptural mind', and as such, the use of scriptural imagery, including the marvellous, surrounding Columba was to afford him the ultimate accolade.<sup>68</sup> A similar approach is today being established in the canonical school of biblical studies: some scholars now accept miracle as a valid category.<sup>69</sup> Hefferman(1988) demonstrates persuasively the ways in which modernist assumptions have confused and defeated attempts to understand hagiographical writings, arguing that we must interpret the *Lives* as far as possible from the perspective of their contemporary readers. 'Popular' opinion, and certainly opinion in the Pentecostal / Charismatic Christian tradition, might be perceived to be more accepting of these phenomena.<sup>70</sup> For the 6th/seventh centuries we might not be incorrect to say that such supernatural phenomena *were* part of everyday experience, as Smyth suggests:

Adomnán was writing for a monastic community and for pious Christians who accepted direct intervention in human affairs as normal.<sup>71</sup>

#### *B. Studying the marvellous in the Life of Columba*

In each of the above cases, we have seen that it is not so much the function of the marvellous phenomena that have been studied themselves, as the function of the literature within which they form so central a part in providing authority for the writer. Fewer studies have focussed on the phenomena as phenomena.

---

68 Márkus and Meek in papers presented at the Sixth Annual SCHA Conference *Spes Scotorum*, 7th June 1997, Edinburgh (publication forthcoming).

69 e.g. Barth, J. Moltmann, C.S.Lewis, Colin Brown.

70 At the 8th Lambeth Conference 1998, Stephen Sykes, Bishop of Ely, reported '480 million people who belong to Pentecostal churches or are associated with charismatic churches in the world.' He said that for the first time Anglicans from all parts of their Communion wanted "to evaluate this vast phenomenon . . . and what [it] signifies for world Christianity." Nan Cobbe, Lambeth Conference Communications, ACNS LC073, 31 July 1998.

71 Smyth(1984)85

1. Picard(1981) collects citations of similar types of the marvellous from the seventh century lives of Irish saints Patrick, Brigit (Cogitosus) and Columba, and 40 or 50,<sup>72</sup> lives of continental saints of Merovingian Gaul. He seeks to show both their common themes, and the differences in treatment of the various topoi in the two geographical groupings. He sees differences in the Irish lives chiefly in their relatively minor interest in 'evangelical' miracles,<sup>73</sup> and in the comparatively rare treatment of the demonic (though angelic references are less than double the demonic references in VC – 20:11 – see app. 1). He sees the Irish as extending the common topos of light as a metaphor for the gift of 'clairvoyance';<sup>74</sup> that visions of heaven do not occur in the seventh century Irish lives; that monsters are more fantastic in continental examples. Of folk tales, especially of natural marvels, he says:

it would be difficult to identify the general tendencies, but one could say that there is a greater concentration of these stories in insular Lives. This last remark is the dominant impression that results from comparing Irish and continental lives.<sup>75</sup>

2. Davies(1989) attempts a more statistical approach. She notes the relative paucity of healing miracles in seventh century Irish *Lives* compared with contemporary continental *Vitae*. She explains the difference as due to lack in Ireland of academic study and practice of medicine as high art; a tradition of care until cured; and a pre-Christian influence of physicians operating by blood-letting and bone-setting, and charm wielding women who heal by magic. Davies correctly identifies a problem at a statistical level. On my own figures for the VC (see appendix 1), the problem is exacerbated. Healing makes up only 2.3% of particular marvellous incidence (cf. Davies' 9%). Davies does not include statistics from NT or the *Lives* of Antony, Benedict or Germanus, all known influences on Adomnán.<sup>76</sup> However, to say,

72 He gives both: 'Some forty continental lives survive [the Merovingian period],'(91); 'The motifs found in fifty continental lives, scattered over two centuries...' (99). Hillgarth(1987)314-5 note 14, records a total of 38 pre-AD750 Merovingian *Vitae*, not including Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus, plus a few dubious cases.

73 A term he derives from Fontaine (1967-9), referring to miracles of healing, resuscitation and exorcism.

74 Sharpe also uses this term to describe Columba's prophetic gifts. McCone gives a perspicacious warning about such mixing of terminology: 'Nativists prone on etymological and other grounds to stress the 'pagan' mantic attributes of the *filii* as 'seer' would do well to reflect on the following Old Testament passage...'for he that is now called a prophet (aybn) was beforetime called a seer (har)' (1 Sam 9:9)', (McCone (1989)136). The main thrust of this comment warns of the danger of making all seers pagan; however, a secondary corollary notices the explicit change of terminology in the Judaeo-Christian tradition regarding the prophet. A similar convention should perhaps be observed regarding his prophetic gifting, or a pagan origin and character to Christian prophecy might, as it were, be imposed.

75 Picard (1981)99. Picard's remarks are of an impressionistic nature.

76 Davies does not show how her figures are derived, making checking and comparison difficult. Nevertheless, her observation has general validity.

'obviously clerical Irish writers did not initially see healing as an appropriate manifestation of saintly power nor local magic as translatable into christian modes of explanation', while using the VC as evidence for this state of affairs leaves numerous questions. Davies notes VC healings. Thus Adomnán, as an early writer, does see healing as a very appropriate manifestation of saintly power, as his general appeal in ii6 shows. Tirechán, on the other hand, is not interested in this sort of evidence. Her use of evidence from secular tales is problematic. In assuming that the use, eg. of spoken charms, recorded even from the seventh century witness genuine pre-Christian tradition in Ireland ignores the central Christian practice of prayer for healing, introduced there at the latest by the mid-fifth century. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, 'local magic' was to be replaced, not translated, as her quote from *Penitentialis Vinniani* shows (49). These last problems will be addressed in chapter two.

3. Stancliffe (1992) uses Derouet's functional categorisation of the miracles in continental lives, and compares his analyses with her own applied to the five earliest (seventh century) Irish Lives. Her results draw similar conclusions to Picard's observation of differences in proportions of miraculous function. She shows that Irish interest in 'Vertical' miracles,<sup>77</sup> what she calls folkloric magical function, and nature miracle, overtook interest in what Derouet calls 'practical' or 'horizontal', and what Picard might term 'evangelical', functions.<sup>78</sup> She notices the relative unimportance of the demonic in 'Irish' lives, by which she can only mean the lives of Patrick and Brigit, positing the influence of Eastern, pre-Augustinian anthropology as the reason. This reasoning does not apply to the VC, however, in which as she recognises, demonic stories are 'more common' as a result, she suggests, of Adomnán's continental reading. This is despite his recording Columba's 'predestination to sanctity', a principle she sees as removing the need for a satanic role (106). Earlier in the paper, Stancliffe makes a curious statement:

I begin with the observation that the devil, and demons, do not play a prominent role in the Judaeo-Christian revelation contained in the Bible. The reason why they loom so large in patristic writing and early saint's Lives is because they were part of the shared thought world of late antiquity. (102).

It is too simplistic to treat the biblical revelation as a whole for this purpose, as the relative part played by the demonic changes markedly with time. In the (Christian) New Testament, her claim is insupportable. Demons play a crucial role in the

<sup>77</sup> i.e. prophesy, angels, visions, regaining paradisiacal state. i.e. miracles which brought the saint into direct contact with the divine, Stancliffe (1992)94.

<sup>78</sup> 'miracles de salut', i.e. healings, exorcisms, calming storms, stopping fires, routing monsters and thieves; and 'punishment' miracles. *ibid* 95.



demonstration of the coming of the Kingdom in the ministry of Christ and the apostles. By 'late antiquity', we assume she means the time of writing of the Lives of Antony and Martin, (i.e. 357/379). Their 'shared thought-world' was pre-eminently influenced by the Bible, and the New Testament is a product of a not dissimilar 'thought world' itself. To separate the biblical from the late antique world view on the basis of their divergent treatment of the demonic, and to employ this as explaining the lack of demonic in (some) Irish hagiography is thus inadequate.

A second statement of Stancliffe bears further investigation here. Her section on folkloric influence is predicated on an extraordinary thought. She concedes the acceptance of the place of the marvellous in the Christian tradition by the Irish hagiographers, but says:

They were all the more likely to [accept its place], in that they were not heirs to the Greek tradition of rational philosophical thought. On the contrary, their culture recognized magic, *druidecht*, and its practitioners, the druids...

Stancliffe infers here that the non-Irish world was heir to Greek rationalism, and thus was less accepting of the idea of 'magic'. One wonders if any culture of the period we are considering could be described as heir to a Greek rationalistic tradition which did not recognise magic, the supernatural, or metaphysical dimension of reality. The Christian tradition which Stancliffe concedes influenced the Irish was itself born and propagated in a world heavily influenced by Greek thought, yet the tradition was founded on miracle, and propagation of the tradition in every geographical milieu was surrounded in claims of the continuation of marvellous phenomena. While there were Greek sceptics who questioned the notion of non-material existence, and Christian sceptics followed them, it is difficult to imagine what Stancliffe understands by 'the' tradition of 'Greek rational philosophical thought' which was inherited by the non-Hibernian world, but was absent in Ireland. Various cultures represented in the Bible, Greek included, had their magi, and magical supernaturalism, as did the (extra-biblical) Asian, Gaulish and Greek worlds.<sup>79</sup> Her thesis rests on the insecure idea of Irish isolation (see above). Many of the differences noted may simply be due the small available sample of very disparate Irish hagiographies which hardly form a coherent genre against which to make comparisons. In addition, we have traced Adomnán's acknowledgment of local scepticism, and should note the rationlistic de-mythologising explanation of scriptural marvels in Irish Augustine's seventh century *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*.

---

<sup>79</sup> see, for example, E.R. Dodds, *The Greek and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951) for an account of non-rational Greek thought systems and/or practices.

*C. The question of functioning nature.*

The preceding discussion aims to summarise existing approaches to the study of the marvellous in hagiography in general, and in the *Life of Columba* in particular. The accounts of the marvellous are literary devices designed to encode Adomnán's purpose in writing. Marvels undergird sanctity, demonstrate authority, differ according to geography, furnish the narrative vehicles for 'apparently-casual remarks'. The studies of Picard, Davies, and Stancliffe on the varying incidences recorded for the phenomena illuminate some questions of source and influence on the way Adomnán composes the *Life*.

However, while these approaches illuminate our understanding of these texts and of the historical period in which they are written, the question of the nature of the phenomena themselves, so important as the vehicle upon which the writer is conveying his intended message, is left open. Each of the hypothetical functions depends for its force on the account Adomnán gives of the marvellous phenomena around which each story is built. The systems of categorisation adopted for comparative studies do not help us to relate the manifestations in the *Lives* to their most obvious archetypes in the Bible, nor to other descriptions in the fathers. These do not record 'vertical', 'horizontal' or 'evangelical' miracles. As we shall see, Adomnán himself would be unlikely to recognise such a functional distinction. For him, all the marvellous phenomena surrounding Columba depend for their direction and empowerment on the sovereign work of God. All come from him, and all affect his creation. All demonstrate intimate connection with their source. I am not here wishing to make a foray into the impossible world of verifying the actual occurrence of an historical miracle. Miracles as phenomena are fraught with difficulty in terms of verification even at close range with multiple attestations. However, no attempt has hitherto been made to elucidate what it is that Adomnán understands by the phenomena whose description he employs to make his case. The question of correspondence of the descriptions he records to archetypes from which the descriptions may be derived is left unaddressed. These may be literary archetypes, or they may be historical. Adomnán may be reporting actions which consciously follow, even emulate or seek to duplicate biblical models. However the account is derived, it is the nature of the marvellous phenomena as marvel which underlies the effectiveness of any putative sanctificatory, political or didactic function. They witness to his understanding of the interaction between the natural and supernatural worlds; of the operation of the Spirit of God in the natural world; and of the expectations he might hold of how this interaction might be manifested. How did he perceive their nature, source, pedigree, and purpose in the ministry of these holy ones whose lives they are reported to have

punctuated? This I wish to call the question of the functioning nature of the phenomena, a nature which once clarified, in view of the important place held in the narratives, may affect our understanding of how they are being used, and what they signify.

*D. The way forward.*

*1. Sixth / seventh century understanding.*

It was to the common monks of his day that Adomnán says he addressed his work.<sup>80</sup> The work may thus be better understood by acknowledging its probable reception by its intended biblically literate audience, and in its seventh century milieu, with a cautious suspension of judgement as to its reality in absolute terms. As we have noted, what is accepted as reality depends much on the perspective of the observer. It will be part of this thesis' intention to illuminate our understanding of what in the realm of the marvellous sixth/seventh century Christians included in their understanding of reality. Herbert says of her own work:

The Lives are assessed as literary works, marked, moreover, by the circumstances of their background and time. They are products of a learned milieu in which native and ecclesiastical areas of interest had merged, and they emerge from monastic institutions which were part of the political and social fabric of their society. A text-centred approach to the Columban works seeks to take account of all these considerations, as it sets out to discover the agenda of the hagiographers and the manner in which they presented their design and purposes to their public (1988, 133).

While taking account of these considerations, I am seeking to pay particular attention not to political, sociological or even ecclesiastical considerations, but to what the author may be shown to understand as the underlying spiritual aspects of the work which contains all these various strands. The monastic institutions were also, perhaps primarily to Adomnán, expressions of the spiritual fabric of their society. Explicit references to the spiritual pervade this work, indeed they make up its very fabric. It is to seek a deeper understanding of some of the spiritual aspects of this remarkable witness to seventh century Irish/Scottish Christianity that this dissertation is directed. As Sharpe has pointed out, early Irish hagiography was not greatly interested in posthumous miracles and the necropolitical cults of English and continental Christianity, a feature shared by Adomnán. For him, the attribution of miracles to the living saint was central to his purpose. It is also central to mine.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Sharpe(1995)63-65.

<sup>81</sup> Sharpe(1991)34. Petersen(1984)20 observes: in general, thaumaturgy in the East was associated primarily with living saints, whereas in the West, it was at the shrines of dead saints. That this does not apply to Martin, Benedict or Germanus, three of Adomnán's principal influences, and all Western saints, shows how dubious the employment of generalities can be in this area.



On the assumption that Adomnán was not simply writing seventh century fiction in order, cynically, to make his case, I will seek to elucidate particular features evident in the collection which may then be compared with other examples. I will be prospecting for clues as to both the nature of the phenomena described, and of Adomnán's interpretative framework, and thus of his theological and phenomenological understanding of this aspect of Columba's life as he bends it to his purpose(s) in writing the life. Adomnán himself gives three quite deliberate categories: the prophetic, miracles of power, visions of angels and of heavenly light, each of which can be seen to be a quite distinctive category of phenomenon.<sup>82</sup> He does not therefore give the historian leave to simplistically account for his account as depending on 'the miraculous' but insists by his division of the book into three that we think rather of prophecy, as distinguished from miracles of power, and again both as distinguished from visions, each in their own categorical natures.

## 2. *The shape of things to come*

Four main areas of question arise from the foregoing discussion. Chapter two will attempt, prompted by the common observation of pagan origin to the marvellous tales, to test the identification of their nature as transferred pagan magic. I have referred to Plummer, Watson, Picard and Stancliffe in this connection with regard to the Irish Lives. Ó Briain also traces the occurrence of secular themes into Irish saints' Lives.<sup>83</sup> Carney suggests an alternative vector of influence.<sup>84</sup> McCone noted further literary parallelisms with the sagas, but has subsequently modified his view to that of Carney.<sup>85</sup> Excepting Picard(1989), none of these deal directly with the question of the assimilation of the concept of marvellous phenomena from pagan Irish religion to Adomnán. As a base point for the discussion, it will be important to establish if there is any evidence to support the proposition in the case of the VC. If this tradition can be confirmed as Adomnán's principle influence, the tales of his hero's marvellous exploits will hold no further interest for a student of the Christian tradition's influence upon him, except to explain how and why he came under such influence so apparently blindly. The reverse finding, that pagan myth was not his primary influence, reinforces the question of what it was he believed concerning the phenomena. Chapter three will investigate the question of the spiritual purpose to which Adomnán employs

---

Clancy(1997) discusses Columba's few recorded posthumous miracles in some detail.

82 Adomnán makes the point for us in the prologue to book III where he says 'the differences between these phenomena will be made clear below, in the places where they are recounted.' (RS)

83 Ó Briain (1947)33-42.

84 Carney (1955 & 1983).

85 McCone(1984)35-38, and (1990).

the marvellous in the VC. O'Reilly's and Márkus noting of the place of the eschatological in these lives will be further investigated. I will introduce into the debate the concept of the nature of the marvellous as signs of the Kingdom of God becoming present not just in monastic asceticism, but in a wider sense of the partial realisation of the conditions of the new creation. Chapter four investigates the question of, whatever maybe the function of the marvellous in the document, does Adomnán disclose a view of their nature, of the way in which they functioned as phenomena in the life upon which he reports. I will examine the role of the eschatological Spirit in their dynamic functioning. Finally, in chapter five, I will probe further into both the theological and circumstantial background to the collection which we have received. Are there any signs in the account of the context from which the stories are putatively derived which might indicate activity beyond the ascetic in which the principals might have been involved. To borrow a phrase of Gilbert Márkus, 'Did Adomnán see Columba as setting out to convert the Picts?'<sup>86</sup>.

---

86 Paper at the Sixth Annual SCHA Conference *Spes Scotorum*, 7th June 1997, Edinburgh.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Pagan Mythological Nature

A plethora of pre-Christian and sub-Christian motifs,  
the survivals of animism, heathen mythology, folklore,  
druidism, primitive magic and secular saga.<sup>1</sup>

#### *A. Paganism, Christianity, and Early Irish Literature.*

I am exploring the nature and purpose of the marvellous phenomena as described in the text of the *Life of Columba* by Adomnán. In seeking a rational hermeneutic to assist navigation through the morass of marvellous phenomena in Irish hagiographies, a principal instrument has been their identification as pagan survivals, identified from parallels in secular sagas. While now challenged in the field of biblical studies,<sup>2</sup> the theory in relation to Irish saints' lives, given its magisterial expression by Charles Plummer in 1910, remains unaddressed.

The study of early Irish literature has produced two principal schools. The views of James Carney(1955),<sup>3</sup> now inconsistently championed by McCone(1990), has challenged the older but still active theories of those, represented by Kenneth Jackson, T.F.O'Rahilly, D.A.Binchy and P.Mac Cana, dubbed 'Nativist' by the pretenders.<sup>4</sup> A brief synopsis of the main issues at stake, though jejune, will set the scene for the ongoing discussion. The 'Nativist' theory, which Plummer accepted, could be said to find anchorage with the arrival in Ireland of the Christian faith during or sometime before the fifth century mission of Patrick. This new belief system gradually replaced,

---

1 Binchy(1982)165. Binchy admits to Hughes' influence in tempering his earlier 'over-statement' ['Patrick and his biographers, ancient and modern', in: *Studia Hibernica* 2(1962), 7-173, at 57] of his case against the historicity of early Irish hagiography on the basis of its pagan mythological content.

2 see note 75 below

3 called 'emerging orthodoxy' by Harvey, as cited by Ó Cathasaigh(1996)61.

4 I am poorly qualified to enter the lively debate at the level of linguistic or methodological discussion. Ó Cathasaigh(1996, 62) recorded that the Nativists have not yet defended their view against McCone's challenge. However, in that year McCone is reviewed excoriatingly by Dumville(1996) and Sims-Williams(1996). Carey's(1998) introduction continues the debate. What Cathasaigh calls the 'under-development' (61) of the field leads me to hope I can make a modest contribution in the restricted area of my concern, building upon the foundation of the experts. To be fair to Plummer, I must use primarily the editions he knew. I must unfortunately proceed only with English translations; where possible, I will use those in the editions Plummer knew so as to remain as close as possible to his sources. Sims-Williams(1996) says 'only examination of the texts themselves' (189) can prove the influence of earlier models. He cautions against 'generalization and homogenization of the sources (195), meaning it is a mistake to approach these literatures as all reflecting a common world view. I hope to take both these cautions into my analysis.

to some degree, that which was present before its advent. The theory is based on the twin hypotheses of Indo-European mythological similarity, and Irish pagan oral composition to form comprehensive and fixed avatars (McCone 1990, 2). Evidence for the beliefs and practices of the old religion is gathered from 'secular' Irish literature, primarily, in Plummer's case, the sagas. Though manuscripts for these are predominantly 11th century and later, linguistic and historical-critical analysis has suggested, in some cases, a codification as early as the late seventh century.<sup>5</sup> These sources are thus assumed to transmit genuine surviving pagan traditions from the pre-Christian to the Christian era.

Complicating this straightforward picture is the fact that the orally composed sagas were codified, redacted and copied by Christian writers. The theory asserts that they worked either as passive scribes, making accurate records of the oral myths (McCone(1990)2-6), or as active censors, excising pagan religious deities and practices (6-7).<sup>6</sup> This subversive motivation produced a christianised, euhemerised version of the oral myths with the purpose of eradicating paganism. The incipit of saga writing (i.e., recording the myths) closely followed the genesis of the Irish hagiographical venture, four survivals of which are the two Latin lives of Patrick; Cogitosus' *Life of Brigit*; and Adomnán's *Life of Columba*. The saint's Lives may thus retain features of pre-Christian religion derived from the 'hard' oral tradition, or its early literary forms. Thus *vitae* may too yield information regarding pagan religious belief and practice as their writers allow this to influence their writing.

The two principle manuscripts of the sagas, the *Book of the Dun Cow* and the *Book of Leinster*, are 11th and 12th century respectively.<sup>7</sup> Linguistic analysis has suggested the sagas were being written down in Irish before the end of the seventh century, and became popular in the eighth, while Christian texts continued to be written in Latin. Jackson believes the Old Irish Ulster cycle achieved their essential form between the second century BC and the fourth century AD, i.e. up until the historical Christian era in Ireland. Piggot(1968) records the terminus of this process for the fifth century in his account of the Druids.

5 McCone (1990)180 accepts the opinion of Thurneyson (*Die Irsche Helden- und Königsage* 1921, 14-16) that there is no good reason to suppose the sagas began to be written on any scale before the eighth century.

6 A theory held by R. Atkinson (1880), E. Hull (1906) and M. Esposito which Plummer and Stokes had adopted in various nuances. It was refuted for lack of evidence by Felim Ó Briain, 'Saga Themes', pp.33-4, following E.J. Gwynn, asserting instead the scrupulosity of the scribes, supported by instances of explicit disapproval of the content of the tales, and reinstated by T.F. O'Rahilly (1946&1952) & P. Mac Cana(1986).

7 See Tomás Ó Concheanainn(1996).



However, the sagas suffer from faulty transmission; political distortion; historical overlays; church censorship (Gantz 1981). They are insecure as sources due to their late preservation, and our inability to check the late manuscripts against oral stories putatively formed before the arrival of Christianity. McCone insists that the existence of the oral avatars essential to this theory has never been substantiated (1990: 5, 13, 17). He challenges the Indo-Celtic hypothesis, which claims retention of archaic cultural and institutional features on grounds of dialect geography. His challenge questions the assumed isolation of Celtic as it developed, arguing for its separation while still in central Europe. It became peripheral, but as a separate language. It has developed significantly, and though it retains archaisms, it has so much influence from ecclesiastical Latin that the meaning of linguistic archaism cannot be certainly linked to Indo-Iranian meanings. Further obscuring the picture of paganism suggested by the sagas are the theories of Rudolph Thurneysen and James Carney. Thurneysen shows the formative influence on the structure and content of the sagas of the Greek hero tales, notably the *Iliad*, imported via Latin translation through the agency of the Christian missionaries. Carney (1955),<sup>8</sup> proposed instead a theory of active literary composition by Christian monastic writers (i.e. authors). They took the remnant survivals of oral myths, and wove them into an historical framework formed from a biblical / ecclesiastical understanding of history. They sought to equate pre-Christian Irish society with pre-Christian Israel, complete with pre-Christian heroes. Thus the new literature presents the history of Ireland according to biblical structures and patterns. It fashions the religion of pre-Christian Ireland in the biblical image of those who worshipped other gods than Yahweh. The writers were 'unenthusiastic' (McCone's intentional understatement, 7) towards paganism, but nevertheless used its imagery to represent the old order, as the Jewish priesthood does in the NT. The same scribes had earlier begun the composition of saint's lives following continental models, set in the same historical frame, but representing the biblical hero (188). As Carney shows (1955, 35f), Adomnán's *Life of Columba* and other ecclesiastical writings came, with the Bible, to influence the sagas, and the entire early Irish literary corpus. Thus the sagas are not a reliable nor comprehensive guide to pre-Christian religion in Ireland, though they may serve to evince some of its features. Similarly, pagan features of the Lives which may have been derived from the sagas, may themselves turn out to be features gained from the Christian interpretation of Irish pagan religion in this Greek and/or biblical/ecclesiastical conformation.<sup>9</sup> The 'nativist'

8 and preceded unnoticed by Ó Briain (1947)34.

9 Thus the interplay between secular saga and Christian tale remains a current field of investigation. See: Ó Briain (1945) and (1947); Binchy (1982); Carney (1983); McCone (1984) and (1990).

theory remains influential: in her 1986 revision of her earlier work on Pagan Celts, Anne Ross records:

...such was the longevity and strength of the oral tradition in Celtic society, where information was handed on by a professional class of tradition-bearers trained in the art, that when the native tradition was finally committed to writing under the aegis of the Christian church, it contained memories of a more archaic world which can be seen to be valid and reliable. (26).

*B. Heathen mythology in Plummer's Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae.*

As I note above, more recent scholars caution against treating the whole corpus as uniform in both the processes involved in delivering the received text to us, and what it portrays / betrays. I wish to examine Plummer's substantial contribution in this light. The assertion of Plummer that comparison of marvellous motifs in the sagas with similar marvellous motifs in the *Lives* suggests a common source in pagan religious belief and practice is unchallenged. In the introduction to *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, published in 1910,<sup>10</sup> Plummer attempts to lay down the foundation of documentary evidence for the suggestion of MacCulloch and others that the source and explanation of the marvellous in the Irish *Vitae* is to be found in the mythology of the secular Irish saga materials. He collects an extensive set of references to illustrate and undergird this hypothesis which has retained currency since its publication. Part V of Plummer's introduction is entitled 'Heathen Folk-Lore and Mythology in the Lives of Celtic Saints'. He asserts the impossibility of understanding the *Vitae* without knowledge of the secular literature. The section is a collection of categories of miracles and stories from Irish *vitae*, including Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, hence his relevance here.<sup>11</sup> He cites parallels in secular literature where found. These parallels are not as common as one might be led to expect, and in fact he criticises others for excessive finding of pagan motifs in Christian literature.<sup>12</sup> However, they form a useful and unique body of evidence with which we can engage in this exploration.

Plummer gives the references from the *Lives* in his collection as examples of both the uniform occurrence of marvellous topoi in pagan and Christian sources, and of the

---

McCone confirms and develops Carney's hypothesis in relation to Christian influence on the sagas. That there are common themes in the two genres is established; the question of the major vector of influence remains in debate. The specific question of the nature and function of the marvellous in these tales is my interest here.

10 VSH cxxix-cxcii.

11 Now see D.A. Bray, *A list of Motifs in the Lives of Early Irish Saints* (Folklore Fellows Communications, no. 252.) Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1992).

12 VSH, clxxxviii & n.7.

way in which pagan influence has affected the recording of the saints' lives. He identifies the effects partly as un-Christian morality, with which we are not primarily concerned here, but mainly as the uncritical adoption of pagan mythological supernaturalism. The concept evinced by Plummer continues to be read into Adomnán's account of Columba. Many of the *vitae* do have what might look like saga-based stories. Ó Briain(1947), Binchy(1982) and Picard(1985) have demonstrated this clearly. W.J. Watson(1915) bases his analysis of the relation of the 'Celtic Church' and paganism on Plummer. Drawing analogies between VC reports of Scottish druidism with the *Vita Tripartita*, *TBC* and *The Tale of the Sons of Uisneach*, he presents the occupation of the Druid's position as key to the success of the Christian mission (273). This conflict, Watson says, influenced and coloured the account of the miracles ascribed to Columba, 'most' of which are 'decidedly not' inspired by scripture.<sup>13</sup> MacInnes(1982) mentions the blend of pagan and Christian religion. He cites two 'breastplate poems', one 'of St Patrick', and another which he calls a pagan invocation. He cites their translator as saying: 'one is a Christian breastplate with druid ornamentation, while the other is a druid breastplate with Christian ornamentation' (225). MacInnes notices a growth in sceptical ambivalence towards what he calls preternatural phenomena in the Gaidhealtachd from the 18th century onwards. He specifically mentions precognition, as sanctified foreknowledge which had been accepted as a Christian miracle, and clairvoyance, distinguished by its connection with the powers of darkness. John McQueen(1989) names Columba a 'Celtic Seer'.<sup>14</sup> Plummer would appear to present the marvellous in the *Vitae* as substantially pagan, i.e. pagan marvels with Christian ornamentation. I wish to pursue the possibility that they were substantially Christian, i.e. they contain survivals of a genuine (to Adomnán) spiritual 'power encounter' with pagan religion.

In the first major re-visitation of Plummer's work, Sharpe(1991) comments on the contemporary criticism of the study of heathen folkloric and mythological aspects of

---

13 Watson(1915)274. He cites five examples: the stake, sailing against contrary wind, abating of storm, unwettable book, salt unaffected by fire, and Watson says, 'He is also a prophet and a clairvoyant' (274), mentioning the Gregorian influence, and the Oswald prophesy. (see chapter 4 below). Watson calls fasting 'pure paganism' (277). He cites an example of what he calls Adomnán's rejection of a tale of pagan 'wave knowledge' which is recorded in the Irish Life, 'which supplied Adomnán with much of his material.' (278) He calls Adomnán's rejection of the tale 'instructive.' While we now know the Irish life was not Adomnán's source, the tradition from which he did select eventually produced it, and Watson's observation of Adomnán's selectivity is noteworthy.

14 Given the historic note by the writer of 1Sam 9.9 ('for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer'), this title may be seen to be particularly anachronistic for a Christian presbyter, unless, again, the author is suggesting Columba's prophecy was pagan clairvoyance. (See note 74, chap. 1 above).



the saints' lives. Sharpe believes this criticism may have been partly motivated by the prevailing attitudes to holiness and the holy life amongst the early 20th century critics, an attitude which Sharpe suggests would have been quite alien to 7th-9th century authors of the lives. It could be that he himself comes under the influence of the interpretation Plummer suggests. In his recent translation of Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, Sharpe occasionally adopts the English term 'clairvoyantly' to translate Adomnán's various terms for prophecy.<sup>15</sup> In this he diverges from all of his predecessors and his own practice elsewhere in the translation, but with no obvious contextual requirement. I wish to suggest that although the choice might simply be to add variety, the term brings with it a field of interpretive meaning to the translation and commentary which is more associated with pagan religious categories. It is thus perhaps a little uncomfortable in the context of a Christian 'biography',<sup>16</sup> unless perhaps the biography is, indeed, using pagan marvellous phenomena to establish the saint's reputation. My aim here is to demonstrate the weakness of the literary evidence supporting pagan supernatural influence on Adomnán. The particular usefulness of VC in this context is its reliability as an early witness, as I have outlined in my introduction; it thus provides a firm seventh century 'snapshot' of the development of the tradition.

Plummer attempts to determine: 'what elements in these lives are derived from the mythology and folk-lore of Celtic heathenism which preceeded the introduction of Christianity.'<sup>17</sup> He claims that the advantage of examining the whole group of lives and comparing similar elements is that whole groups of miracles and legends find a common explanation as derivations from pre-Christian pagan mythology, and thus we can explain away some of the offensive elements such as excessive thaumaturgy in some of the Lives.

Moreover, by means of this comparison many things in these lives, which at first sight

---

15 'said clairvoyantly' for *prophetice profatur*; (i.17) 'clairvoyantly described' for *praedicta*, (i.28) and 'clairvoyantly said' for *profetizans ait*. (i.35) He also describes Columba's prophecy as clairvoyance on p.16 and notes 133 & 265. In this he emulates Picard(1981)95, who derived the term from Mac Cana, a 'Nativist'.

16 In ii.11; ii.32; ii.33 & 34, Sharpe chooses the term 'wizard' to translate Adomnán's *magus*. Here he is in mixed company, with APF&F choosing Druid, and AA choosing the near equivalent 'magician.' (MacCulloch records that the modern Irish term *druí* means 'sorcerer'). Here he introduces a magical element to the naming of the pagan holy men, where it no doubt fits the context, but differentiates the Pictish magi from those in Ireland, where the term may signify wise or knowing ones. That part of their knowledge may be called magic does not mean that the performance of magic is their whole function; they were also teachers and advisors. Ross(1986) speculates the loss of their political advisory and teaching function as the Christian mission developed(115).

17 VSH, iv. He later (clxxxi.8) notes the stress laid by Thomas Wright in 1844 (*St Patrick's Purgatory* 79ff) on the close connexion of saint's legends and fairy tales.

naturally cause offence, find an explanation, if not an excuse of which those who are jealous for the honour of the Celtic saints may be glad to avail themselves. <sup>18</sup>

In other words he wished to defend the reputation of the saints. He also wants to use these abstracted elements to throw light on the mythology which putatively spawned them.

Plummer adopts Harnack's opinion of the growth of the church in Asia Minor for Ireland, 'without the alteration of one word':

Heathenism was absorbed without any violent conflict. It disappears, in order to reappear, proportionately strong, in the Church. Nowhere else did the conquest and "uprooting" of heathenism cause so little difficulty. It was, in fact, not uprooted, only modified.<sup>19</sup>

He says that there are few records of conflict,<sup>20</sup> and no martyrs in Ireland, suggesting this to be due to the clan system where the chief adopted the new faith, carrying the masses who retained their old faith under a veneer of politically necessary Christianity. He observes that conversion takes time to fully transform even individuals and that the early Irish clergy as a group were tolerant of the heathen literature and its mythology. This led to a retention of heathen elements within the new faith. Plummer appears to be saying here that the distinction normally drawn between the popular Christianity of the masses who follow their chief in nominal conversion, and the Christianity presented by its leaders and recorders is not seen in Ireland.<sup>21</sup> The Christian leaders and authors are as unconscious of their continued heathenism as are the illiterate masses. It is the familiarity of the Christian scribes with the sagas (Plummer does not distinguish the oral from the written form) that leads them to incorporate pagan tales into their Christian writings. The sagas often incorporated saints and other Christian motifs, 'with a fine disregard for chronology and morality.'<sup>22</sup> He goes on to state: 'Much greater was the influence of secular story on ecclesiastical legends,'<sup>23</sup> and he remains in some doubt as to whether whole classes of miracles (resuscitation,

18 VSH, iv. Binchy was likewise troubled by the inheritance by Patrick of 'disagreeable characteristics of the very druids who were overthrown by him.' (1962, 58). McCone notes this, but observes 'the fact is, however, that there was a ready supply of biblical models...', citing Moses, Elijah and Elisha. (1990, 195).

19 A. Harnack, *Mission und Ausbreitung* (1902), p.42, as quoted and cited in VSH cxxx note 3. I quote it again in full here because of its importance in my later discussion of Plummer's preconceptions as he approaches this work.

20 Though later in part V he says: 'In all the legends which have anything to do with the beginnings of Christianity in Ireland the druids meet us at every turn as the chief, if not the only, opponents of the new faith.' Which appears to be at variance with his point here concerning the lack of opposition.

21 See Cameron (1991), for a critique of this distinction.

22 VSH, cxxxi-ii.

23 VSH, cxxxi.

transmutation, multiplication, tongues, walking on water) are secular or Christian. 'Often we can feel pretty sure that in spite of ecclesiastical assimilation, the substratum comes from popular tradition.'<sup>24</sup> This influence came by direct importation, conscious imitation, and unconscious permeation. His debt to Delahaye is made explicit: the sameness of the miracles in the lives of saints is largely due to the sameness of the folk-tales to which they are related.<sup>25</sup>

Plummer summarised his view of Celtic pagan religion:

Celtic heathenism seems to have consisted of two main elements: a system of nature worship with departmental gods, of whom the sun and fire god was the chief; and a system of magic, or Druidism.

He traces the former to the Celtic in-comers, and the latter to the pre-Aryan inhabitants.<sup>26</sup> He focuses his description of Celtic nature-worship on what he calls the influence of the Solar cult. Plummer identifies certain 'solar saints', who manifest features of the 'solar cult' of the Celts. These often have a name including 'Lug' the sun deity, and include in their stories: fiery manifestations, heavenly light, face of blazing flame, extinguishing or kindling fire.<sup>27</sup> Plummer suggests animal stories may be associated with the solar cult, including relationships, savings, and wolves. He says without justification:

It is clear that the ideas underlying these stories go back to a time when no hard and fast line was drawn between men and animals...<sup>28</sup>

He also identifies influences of a Celtic water deity, predominantly among southern Irish saints. They walk on water, produce animals from it, record a submarine city, and produce fountains.<sup>29</sup> The cult of sacred trees is also represented; as is the 'pre-Aryan' cult of stones.<sup>30</sup>

Magicians and druids from the sagas and *vitae*, Plummer claims, are part of an older tradition.<sup>31</sup> He draws a close comparison between the activities of the druids and

---

<sup>24</sup> VSH, cxxxiii.

<sup>25</sup> VSH, cxxxiii. n.1, citing Delehay, *Legendes* pp8, 29-30. Given the discrete range of marvellous phenomena in both secular and Christian record, it is difficult to conceive of how this could be otherwise.

<sup>26</sup> VSH, cxxxiii. It is worth noting Plummer's acceptance here of the prevailing view of Irish pre-history which was based on a reading of the sagas as records of pre-Christian history.

<sup>27</sup> VSH, cxxxvi ff. McCone (1990, 57) notes from Thompson 1946 that Andrew Lang debunked the theory, but that it remained an influence on O'Rahilly (1946). See McCone's chapter 7, 'Fire and the Arts'.

<sup>28</sup> VSH, cxli ff.

<sup>29</sup> VSH, cxlvii f.

<sup>30</sup> VSH, clii-clvii.

<sup>31</sup> Plummer here follows Bertrand, *La Religion des Galois*, (1897).

what he calls the derivative Christian *sancti*.<sup>32</sup> Both held court positions: he cites numerous examples where druids and clergy are together serving in the courts of rulers as advisors and confessors. He denies the victory of the spiritual over the magical; people saw only the triumph of a more powerful sort of magic.<sup>33</sup> Intellectual knowledge was wisdom and power.<sup>34</sup> Both druids and clerics acted as prophets, foretelling the future, and often communicating in poetry.<sup>35</sup> The druid was a 'clairvoyant' with second sight, the Christian saw absent events 'in the spirit',<sup>36</sup> and both remotely detect and punish crime.<sup>37</sup> They both have extended hearing and voice and both are recorded as being involved in 'sight shifting' or 'ocular illusion' e.g. bull's milk and recovery in VC ii.17.<sup>38</sup> Miracles, which he calls fairy tales,<sup>39</sup> include the iron knife of VC ii.29, and the stake of VC ii.37; vermin expulsion e.g. of snakes (VC ii.28, iii.23) is compared with druidic delousing.<sup>40</sup> Plummer believes angels replace the fairies, 'the most favoured of all [in receiving visitations of angels] being saint Columba'.<sup>41</sup> Stones are printed, holed by a finger, used in healing (VC ii.33); cursing stones occur in only one life.<sup>42</sup> Plummer believes the maledictory character of some saints probably derives from Druids, though Bede mentions it of the saints specifically.<sup>43</sup>

### C. A Question of Origins.

I want to investigate whether Plummer's explanation has adequately considered the possibility that the marvels in the *Vitae* might have a more demonstrable origin, function and nature than pagan religion. Indicating the line we will pursue, Meek states recently:

It is...evident that writers are now rather less inclined to find parallels for the visions and miracles of the saints in the alleged paganism of the Celtic past, and are turning

---

<sup>32</sup> VSH, clix.

<sup>33</sup> VSH, clxvii. Binchy sees a similar progression; Patrick 'beats them at their own game, for he wins by "bigger and better magic" (1962, 58). This is no more than the apostles do (Acts 8.9f; 16.16). Whether Patrick or Adomnán would accept this description of God's power as magic is questionable.

<sup>34</sup> VSH, clxvi.

<sup>35</sup> VSH, clxii ff see n.6 noting foretelling the future of individuals; clxx n.7 recording the *Amra* claim that no company ever reached Columba without his foreknowing. (*Revue Celtique* xx.140).

<sup>36</sup> VSH, clxx. Here, in drawing the parallel, Plummer makes the distinction.

<sup>37</sup> VSH, clxvii.

<sup>38</sup> VSH, clix & clxix.

<sup>39</sup> VSH, clxxxiv.

<sup>40</sup> VSH, clxx.

<sup>41</sup> VSH, clxxxi-ii.

<sup>42</sup> VSH, clv ff. Plummer gives no secular parallel for the stone in VC ii.33.

<sup>43</sup> VSH, cxxxv & clxxiii f. citing (*HE*.ii.260). Again, see McCone (1990, 195f), note 16 above. Other parallels include: Sleep clxxii f: soul travel; Bachall clxxiv: pastoral staff used variously cf. Bell; Taboos clxxxiii.



more effectively, and in my view more fairly, to the Bible.<sup>44</sup>

A more subtle question still regards the line which the investigator draws between what may be described as acceptably 'Christian' and what, in contradistinction, must be regarded as essentially pagan. The lines are often difficult to draw, and may change with time and locality, and especially with the view of the observer. Due to the richness of the collection, an exhaustive analysis would be beyond the scope of this project, and beyond its direct interest. However, Plummer does reference *VC* specifically at various points, drawing comparisons and giving parallels to the pagan mythological phenomena he distinguishes. I wish to proceed to review this collection of cross-references to assess the validity of his hypothesis of the pagan origin and nature of marvellous phenomena as it applies to *VC* specifically.

A second delimiter is to disregard Plummer's very many cross-references to other *Lives* of saints and Christian writings. He makes the point that his broad approach is more 'scientific' in tracing common themes and topoi in the whole genre, thus dispensing with the laborious need to explain individual phenomena as in Baring-Gould's work, and giving a macro-explanation to each class of phenomenon. However, citation of a supernatural phenomenon in other Christian lives cannot be accepted as exemplifying pagan influence in *VC*, no matter how close the parallelism, unless there is convincing evidence proving a pagan source for the other Christian text, and the influence of this text on the *VC*.<sup>45</sup> Often, the natures of Plummer's parallels are not clear without detailed knowledge of his sources.

An example of Plummer's citation of Christian parallels comes in his description of the druids. In reference to the 'druidic hedge' (clxi n.1), he cites *AU* 560, *RC* xvii.144, *LS* xxviii f and *Silva Gadelica* i.79. All four are Christian sources.<sup>46</sup> *RC* xvii.144 refers to Columba's prayer for the mist to lift at the battle of Cúl Drebene in the *Annals of Tigernach* (*AU* 560). There seems little need for the mist here to be anything other than natural; Plummer's uncertainty is justified. Columba's reference to his 'druid' is his often noticed metaphorical designation for Christ, and not a reference to an actual

---

44 Meek(1997)54-55.

45 Dating of the composition of the *Vitae* edited in Plummer's collection has yet to be established, with the exception of the *Vitae Brigidae* in Sharpe's edition (1991), and *VSS Ailbe, Ciarán and Déclán*, R.Sharpe, 'Quatour Sanctissimi Episcopi', in: McCone (1984)396. However, the documentary witnesses of the remainder appear to be late, thus at this stage it would appear unlikely to be able to place their composition with any confidence as being before *VC*. What is readily apparent in examining Plummer's collected references is that various topoi do recur in the *Vitae*, and that some of these same topoi appear in some of the secular sagas, as we shall see.

46 i.e. *Annals of Ulster*; *Revue Celtique*, *Lismore Saints*. This example serves to illustrate both the need to be able to interpret Plummer's code, and why the numbers of references to secular sources are fewer than at first one might suppose.

pagan priest. The texts cited from *Silva Gadelica* and *LS* are of the Irish 12th century homiletic *Life* of Columba. As such, they demonstrate the commonplace nature of this topos in Christian writing. There is a clear parallel from here with the Druidic mist of VC ii.34, not noted by Plummer. The sagas also record the same phenomenon, and thus, Plummer reasons that the Christian sources have been influenced by the (earlier) pagan, thus corroborating his theory. The ethical dimension provides a form of the correlative evidence I mention, in that its character is taken to show pagan influence on the writers. But unless it is demonstrably present at each point of the particular reference, and is in direct relationship to a particular supernatural manifestation, affecting its character by, for instance, giving it a pagan source of power, or an ethical outcome which was indefensible for a Christian miracle, it is perhaps difficult to identify other supernatural phenomena albeit in the same literary source, as pagan in origin. Some of Plummer's sources are suspect in other ways. e.g. *Silva Gadelica* is reviewed by Kuno Meyer who says, 'It is impossible to use the book with any degree of confidence either for linguistic or for other purposes...' <sup>47</sup> Thus while the references are in themselves interesting, and show the presence of such stories in the later literary traditions, they cannot be adduced as evidence for the pagan origin of stories in the VC. It is, conversely, in so far as it is reliable, evidence for later Christian belief regarding a contest with pagan religion which took place as the faith was introduced into the Provinces.

*1. Late oral secular sources cited by Plummer indicating a parallel in the VC.*

Plummer's evidence may be divided into two broad categories. The first is that collected mainly from oral sources in more recent times, especially during the surge of popularity of folk-tale collection in the nineteenth century. One example of such comes in Plummer's section on 'second sight' (clxx-clxxi). He cites an example from Rhys' *Celtic Folklore* <sup>48</sup> of the transfer by physical contact of 'the faculty of vision...magically or miraculously extended.' This fairy story tells of a farmer of Deinant, near Aberdaron in North Wales, who was visited by a member of the Tylwyth Teg while relieving himself outside his front door. Touched by the visitor, the farmer is shown his fairy mansion beneath the location, never before seen, and asked to stop the nightly flood. The farmer is so ready to oblige that he bricks up the door, and from then on, uses the back door as main entrance. This is evidently a clear secular example of the phenomenon of 'second sight', and of the mode of transmission of the gift (see discussion below). The phenomenon of such visionary revelations, though differing in actual content, form a significant section of

<sup>47</sup> Kuno Meyer, Review of *Silva Gadelica* in: *RC* 15, 122.

<sup>48</sup> i.230; *VSH*, clxxi n.9.



Adomnán's account of the prophetic ministry of Columba. Plummer mentions from VC only i.1&43.<sup>49</sup>

Rhys' tale was collected by Rhys from Evan Williams, smith of Yr Ardd Las, Rhos Hirwaen, in the late nineteenth century. It is thus chronologically remote, and is from another, albeit Celtic, land. The question of precedence is unequivocal: VC is the earlier witness. The question of a demonstrable provenance for the tale anterior to the farmer is in all probability unanswerable, and remains firmly within the realm of speculation. That Adomnán could have derived his category of what he calls 'declaring absent things to those present' (VC i.1: 10a) from this tale is so improbable that the evidence cannot be taken seriously. Plummer cites numerous such sources in connection with the VC.<sup>50</sup> The accumulated evidence does build a clear picture of the presence of the categories of phenomena he illustrates with it in (19th century) folklore. The similarity between these accounts and many in the lives of saints, including Columba is accepted. The longevity of the tales of the phenomena into modern folklore may also be accepted. However, none of these tales can be adduced to demonstrate anything of the influence on 6th/7th century writers, nor of the origins or nature of the tales of the phenomena. For this, we must pass on to assess the second category of Plummer's evidence.

49 In the note following (clxxi n.10), Plummer refers to the phenomenon extended to the envisioning of the whole world. He cites VC i.1 & 43, the two accounts of Columba's Gregorian explanation of this gift, with a parallel from Grimm (1883-1900), i.136. Grimm traces the record from Paul the Deacon and others of the characteristic of the supreme Teutonic deity Wuotan looking down from his throne and seeing the whole earth (135). This prospect is only afforded from the seat, and may be enjoyed by others there seated. Grimm makes it clear that this is a commonplace in folk literature, is a 'god-like' attribute, and has links but not precise parallels in the Bible (136). The throne is clearly not significant to this ability in VC; Columba is depicted as exercising the gift in various places. God-like attribute it may be, but, as we shall see in chapter 4 below, the Christian system had a sophisticated explanation of its nature and function. Grimm is cited variously by Plummer. The citations refer to parallel manifestations in the pagan Teutonic traditions, and as Plummer's critics made clear, show only the commonplace nature of the topoi in folk mythology. In the attempt to limit the scope of this inquiry to pagan Irish sources, I will not further consider them.

50 VSH, clxxxix-cxcii. I record here for the sake of completeness the modern publications with which Plummer associates tales from the VC: which I do not refer to elsewhere; Martin, M., *A Description of the Western Isles*, 2nd ed. (1716); Andrew Lang, *Myth, Ritual and Religion*, 2 vols. (1887/1906); W.G. Wood-Martin, *Pagan Ireland, an Archaeological Sketch* (1895); W.G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland* (1902); P.D. Hardy, *Holy Wells of Ireland*, (1836). Hardy published various works opposing the restoration of Roman Catholicism in Ireland, e.g. *Ireland in 1846-7: A Consideration of the recent rapid growth of Popery; with suggestions for remedying the evil and for promoting the moral and spiritual improvement of the people.* (1847). A possible motive of Plummer the Anglican in resisting the acceptance of the marvels in relation to the Irish saints could be to undermine the restoration; this publication of Hardy would appear to confirm the existence of this resistance in one of the authors we know Plummer to have read, though we can only conjecture that he might have read this particular tract.

2. *Late literary secular sources cited by Plummer indicating a parallel in the VC.*

a. Texts: Sources whose codification is reckoned to be early, and whose extant documentary evidence is more or less secure are fewer. For some types of phenomena in tales from each group, Plummer draws a direct parallel with the VC: Others have parallels, but Plummer does not note them. I have examined and quoted the editions cited by Plummer, and transcribed the spellings of those editions. That there are parallels to be observed with VC will be shown in the following examples. (The first two sources, Keating and O'Flaherty, are less secure than the remainder, so are dealt with separately.)

*i. Keating.*

(a) Plummer cites Keating's *History* in a short section regarding the expulsion of vermin (clxx n.3); he cites VC ii.28, iii.23 as parallels. In Keating's account of the journeying of Niul to Egypt from Scythia (Bk I.XV), Gaedheal, ancestor of the Irish nation, son of Niul, was bitten by a serpent. Niul takes his son to Moses, who heals him by applying the rod he held in his hand:

Moses said that in what place soever the stock of that youth would settle, there no serpent would ever have venom, and this is verified in Crete, ...in which some of his posterity are; it is without serpents as Ireland is. And although there were serpents in Ireland up to the coming of Patrick, I do not think they had venom; or I imagine it is the demons that are called serpents in the Life of Patrick.<sup>51</sup>

c.f. VC ii.28: [Columba] tried to comfort them as far as might be, and raising both his holy hands he blessed all this island of ours, and said, 'From this moment of this hour, all poisons of snakes shall be powerless to harm men or cattle in the lands of this island, so long as the inhabitants of that dwelling-place shall observe the commandments of Christ.

...and c.f. VC iii.23(125a): After which, still sitting in the wagon, he turned his face to the east, and blessed the island, with the islanders its inhabitants. And from then to the present day, as has been written in the above-mentioned book, the poison of three-forked tongues of vipers has not been able to do any injury to either man or beast.

(b) In his section referring to the cult of fountains (cxlix-clii), Plummer cites a tale from Keating of the magical production of a fountain from a rock (cl n.3). He includes VC ii.10 (cl n. 9) as an example of a similar phenomenon by a different means. Cormac, King of the Ulaid had:

...druids from Alba with him there, who practiced magic against the King of Munster... the King of Munster was obliged to send for Moga Ruith, a druid... [he]

---

<sup>51</sup> Keating(1908)VIII 19.

threw up into the air a magic spear which he had, and in the place in which the spear fell there burst forth a well of spring water. (Keating II p.321)

c.f. VC ii.10: ...because water was not to be found anywhere near, (Columba) turned aside to a rock close by, bowed his knees, and prayed for a little while. And rising after his prayer, he blessed the face of the rock, from which thereupon water flowed in an abundant cascade.

## ii. O'Flaherty.

Plummer cites VC ii.17 as an example of what he terms 'Sight shifting' (clxix n.1) and gives *Iar-Connaught* p.263 as a parallel (n.9).<sup>52</sup> Plummer's reference here is to the notes appended to O'Flaherty by James Hardiman, p.261 note u, 'The Craft of Evil Spirits'. In the text, O'Flaherty is referring to the enchanted isle of 'O'Brazil' (Begara or Lesser Aran). He says:

Whether it be reall and firm land, kept hidden by speciall ordinances of God as the terrestiall paradise, or else some illusion of airy clouds appearing on the surface of the sea, or the craft of evil spirits, is more than our judgments can sound out.

In elucidation, Hardiman notices (p.263) the 'art magic' of Mannanán Mac Lir, first ruler of Man, from what he calls 'the old Statute Book of Man'.

He kept the land under mists by his necromancy. If he dreaded an enemy, he would of one man cause to seem one hundred.<sup>53</sup>

and he notes that William Sacheverall, Governor of Man, in his *Short Survey* (London 1702) p.20 states that the Manx nation place Mac Lir about the beginning of the 5th century.<sup>54</sup> Plummer gives VC ii.17 as an instance of the demonic origin of the phenomenon being familiar to Adomnán: ...a sorcerer (*maleficus*) is commanded to draw milk from a bull by his diabolic art. Columba then reveals the true nature of the milk as blood 'bleached by the imposture of demons to deceive mankind' and heals the bull which has been bled near to death.

## b. Commentary.

i. While we can readily accept the parallelism Plummer observes in Keating for VC, the problem of chronology is acute. Keating finished his work around 1634, having gathered his material from mss. then in circulation. Many are now lost, so critical comment on the work is difficult. The edition of Keating cited by Plummer was based

<sup>52</sup> O'Flaherty(1846). Plummer misses Reeves' reference to a reminiscent story in St Fechin's life, Colgan, *Acta SS.* p.131a (Reeves(1857)126-7).

<sup>53</sup> No reference is given, but the work referred to is possibly *The Ancient Ordinances and Statute Laws of the Isle of Man*, published by M.A.Mills, (Douglas: Phoenix, 1821).

<sup>54</sup> p.21, note u.

on an MS written ca.1645.<sup>55</sup> However, nearly 1000 years separates his collection from that of Adomnán. The origin legend is here clearly being linked to the Judao-Christian tradition, and so in this form is heavily Christianised, and thus must post-date the introduction of the faith to Ireland. Plummer says:

The classical instance is, of course, Patrick expelling serpents and other reptiles from Ireland; c.f. *Tr.Th.* p.102. But Columba did the like for Iona, *Adamn.* ii.28, iii.23...<sup>56</sup>

The writer of Keating's story refers to a *Life of Patrick*. According to Fowler(1894, xxxii) the earliest extant reference to this tale of snakes is that of Jocelyn (*Tr.Th.* 102), compiled >1185. *Vitae* II & IV are 11th, and III ante-12th century (Lap&S 107), and do not have it. Thus the writer of this section of the Niul myth is likely to have been writing later than the 11th century traditions, and arguably after Jocelyn. Plummer does not notice the chronological disparity between *VC* of the 7th, and Keating's 12th century tale. The chronology makes it difficult for Adomnán to have been influenced by this version of the myth. All we are left with is evidence of a topos from an early Christian life turning up in a late secular myth. Now, if the tradition records an oral myth which had been extant in the 7th century, it is of course possible that Adomnán could have known it.<sup>57</sup> Is there circumstantial evidence of influence? The stories differ in important detail. For protection to be maintained on Iona, the commandments of Christ as distinct from those of Moses will need to be followed. Here is further sign of monastic composition placing pre-Patrician Ireland in relation with Old Testament history. The protection appears to have been limited to this island, and not to extend across a whole territory of influence, as with Gaedheal or Patrick. The prophecy over Gaedheal in the Irish origin myth is that snakes in Ireland would not have venom, while the story records the total absence of snakes from Ireland, from Patrick's time onward.<sup>58</sup> This was recorded as the explanation for their absence from Ireland, venomous or not,<sup>59</sup> and is referred to in the tale of Gaedheal. Adomnán by contrast, and more subtly in line with normality, records the inability of the venom of snakes to harm man or beast on Iona after Columba's blessing. His story accepts the presence of venomous snakes on Iona, and their retention of venom which is necessary for their own habit. (Naturally venomous snakes deprived of their venom could not survive naturally.) Divine protection against its harmful affect on man or cattle, the latter being important to the insular economy, is prophesied. This has a completely different point

---

<sup>55</sup> *Keating*, II.xiii.

<sup>56</sup> *VSH*, clxx n.3.

<sup>57</sup> I am not aware of any earlier record of this redaction of this story of Niul than Keating, but it is this redaction to which Plummer refers, and thus this which I address.

<sup>58</sup> See my further discussion below, chapter 3. Sharpe(1995)n.276 notes Gregory's equivalent of this topos for Florentius (*Dial* 3.15), and see Hilary, *Life of Honoratus* (§15, PL 50, tr. Hoare, 260).

<sup>59</sup> *Trias Thaum.* p.102.



from both Keating's author and Jocelyn. The habit of the Ionan venomous snake is not interrupted; his presence is not terminated; only the effect of a strike on an animal not normally prey to the snake is affected. We thus have not only a more subtle tale, but one with a clear precedent in a tradition which certainly preceded Adomnán, and which we can be virtually certain he would have known:

And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them. (Mark 16:17-18) // Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. (Luke 10:19).

Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, when a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. (Acts 28:3-5).

These NT eschatological features are in turn pre-figured by OT prophecy:

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD. (Isaiah 65:25).

Though here the exact fate of the serpent does not anticipate VC, the general eschatological prophecy with the reference to its geographical situation 'on my holy mountain' may have had a certain resonance for those staying on the flanks of Dùn Ì. The island itself may, in common with monastic islands elsewhere (e.g. Lérins) and the monasteries themselves, have been regarded as an expression of the new Zion.<sup>60</sup>

Keating's second reference regarding the spear and the spring likewise suggest a strong biblical precedent, as Plummer himself concedes. He observes in reference to a similar phenomenon in the *Life of Ailbe* that 'the biblical parallel of Moses smiting the rock has clearly been at work.'<sup>61</sup> If for the writer of Ailbe's life, perhaps also for Keating's source? All that can safely be accepted here is that traditions concerning snakes and water occur in both Christian and secular/pagan traditions. Keating cannot be accepted as authority for pagan borrowings or influence in VC. That the Christian biblical tradition acts as source for Adomnán is both chronologically and circumstantially suggested, and there is a possibility that the Christian tradition as represented in Jocelyn might *on the contrary* have influenced Keating's author.

60 This conjecture will be followed up as the thesis progresses.

61 VSH cl n.2. Again I am not aware of an earlier redaction of this tale in alternative sources which would help with the chronological question.

ii. In Plummer's reference to O'Flaherty, Hardiman notes a reference in Cormac's *Glossary* to Manannán which reads:

He used to know by studying the heavens (i.e. using the sky) the period which would be fine weather and the bad weather, and when each of the two times would change.<sup>62</sup>

*The Annals of the Four Masters* records Cormac's death in 903, AU908. His entry can be interpreted as giving the impression that Manannán used omens to foretell the weather, but this is not necessary. It could be his skill as an early weather forecaster that is being noted. While the parallel tale of the bull in VC has no direct biblical antecedent, there is no lack of biblical background by which the account could be inspired: Moses' encounter with the Pharaoh's magicians (*malefici* in Vulgate) sees a river turned to blood both by Moses and by the incantations of the magicians (Ex 7.19ff). This is not described as illusion, but it is an example of the phenomenon. The prophet Ezekiel delivered a promise of freedom from the snare of magic charms (Ezek 13.20), it is thus possible that Adomnán had Ezekiel's freedom from the snares of magic charms in mind as he wrote of exposure of demonic deceit.<sup>63</sup> Acts 8.11 records the ending of the bewitching influence of the Samaritan *magus* Simon,<sup>64</sup> though notably here it is described as having been ended by the agency of preaching the Kingdom of God, and Simon only saw the *signa* and *virtutes maximas* after he began to follow Philip, whereas in VC, it is the prophetic insight and truth revealing blessing of Columba which confounds the sorceries.

### 3. Early Secular sources cited by Plummer indicating a parallel in the VC.

a. Texts: We now proceed to assess Plummer's references to sources which have an earlier authority. In his section on fountains, Plummer refers to VC ii.11 (cl n.9) as an example of making a noxious into a wholesome 'fountain'. He does not say if 'wholesome' includes healing, though Adomnán does. He goes on (cl n.14) to refer further to the healing properties of fountains, with three secular parallels:

i. *Cath Maige Tuired*. In a mythical contest between the Tuath Dé Danaan and the Fomorians, the narrative describes a well over which Diari-cecht, his two sons, and his daughter sang spells.

Their mortally wounded men were cast into it... they were alive (when) they would

62 *Sanas Cormaic* ed. Whitley Stokes, tr. John O'Donovan (Calcutta 1868).

63 Vulgate has here the term *pulvillos*, (lit. small pillow), having apparently confused the root of the Hebrew here which actually refers to a preservative band worn around wrist or head (Gk *phylacterion*); I am most grateful to Dr. Dominic Rudman for this enlightening exegesis. We can thus not be certain that Adomnán would have had the interpretation of Ezekiel that I am suggesting at this point.

64 Simon also appears extensively in the NY Apocrypha, well known to the early Gaelic writers.



come out. Their mortally wounded became whole through the might of the chant of the four leeches who were about the well.<sup>65</sup>

ii. *Dindshenchas*. In the opinion of the author of the quoted section of the prose *Dindshenchas*, 'Loch Dergdeirc' received its name when Ferchertre of the Ulaid took the eyes of Eochaid, King of Munster. Eochaid went to wash in the well:

...and as he dipt his head thrice under the water all the well became red. Then because of the miracle of generosity... both his eyes came to the king, and as he looked on the well he said: "A red hollow (*dergderc*) is this hollow, and this will be every one's name for it." Whence Loch Dergdeirc is said.<sup>66</sup>

iii. *Cath Finntrágha*. This tale from the Finn cycle refers to the three daughters of Terg mic Dolair from Tiberias in the east. They say they have come to help Finn and his army against the king of Spain.

"Our help to thee will be good," said they, "for we shall form a druidical host around thee from the stalks of... , and from the top of the watercress, and though armies and multitudes be killed around thee, they will cry to the foreigners, and beat their weapons out of their hands, and take away their strength and their sight. And the King of Spain and 400 of his people will be killed by thee, and the battle of Ventry will be fought a day and a year, and there will be fresh fighting in it every day during that time. And be thou of good cheer, for if even thou art killed every day, thou wilt be whole again in the morning, for we shall have the well of healing for thee, and the warrior that thou lovest best of all the Fianns of Erin shall obtain the same as thou."<sup>67</sup>

After the battle, in various episodes involving the druidic host taking their strength and their sight of the 'foreigners,' Concrithir, Finn's watchman at the harbour of Ventry, goes wounded to the three women:

And he went to seek them, and they put him under the healing spring, and he came out whole (10).

We can confirm a clear parallel between VC ii11 and these secular works.

after the saint's blessing... many infirmities among the people were in fact cured by the same well.

Next is a selection which deal with the parallel Plummer draws between druidic second-sight and saintly prophecy for which Plummer cites as parallel VC i.44 :

iv. *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin (The voyage of Mael Dúin's boat)*.<sup>68</sup> (clxxi n.5) The section of the tale relates how a woman welcomes the voyagers by name as they

65 *Cath Maige Turedh* Stokes(1891)94.

66 Stokes(1894/5)462. This reference is from the prose, not the metrical *Dindshenchas*.

67 *Cath Finntrágha* O'Rahilly(1962)7.

68 *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin* .XVII, Stokes(1888)490.

arrive, and tells them their coming has been foreknown. In *VC* i.44, Crónán, a bishop of Munster, comes incognito to Iona. However Columba recognises his episcopal status as he goes to assist him at the Lord's table.

v. *Do Fogluim Chonculainn (The training of Cúchulainn)*. Plummer cites this work in his section on 'second sight' regarding the foreknowledge of guests, (clxx n.7). This knowledge of unknown arrivals occurs five times in the *VC* (i.2, 4, 26, 27, 33.) These are not noted by Plummer though he does note a reference in the *Amra* to Columba's unfailing foreknowledge of guests.<sup>69</sup> In the secular tale, Scáthach, daughter of the King of Scythia, said:

look well at that youth for it was shewn to me a short time ago that a young, childlike  
unold youth was coming to me from the West... that he would be the prophesied  
son.<sup>70</sup>

The similarity of this prophecy to that regarding the young man Fintan mac Tulcháin (*VC* i.2) is striking.

vi. *Cath Muige Léana (The Battle of Magh Leana)*.

(a) Charms for protection (clxxix n.1): Plummer draws the parallel with Adomnán's record of the posthumous power of hymns commemorating Columba to protect their singers from attack (*VC* i.1: 9b), and Magh Léana's record of a 'path protection' (p.36-7). Eadoin the druid declares that he will send a 'Path Protection' charm with Eoghan on his expedition to Spain. It will bring him back safely to Erinn.

(b) Druidic prophesy (clxii n.6): As part of the same discourse, Eadoin declares that Eoghan will be nine years deprived of Erinn (i.e. in exile) during which time he will make the expedition to Spain, because he had spent nine nights recovering from the battle (pp.36-7). We may compare this to the tale of the seven year penitential exile of Librán declared by Columba (*VC* ii.39).

(c) Later the King of Spain ordered Dadróna the druid to his presence; he requested him to procure knowledge for him of the man who his daughter should espouse.

"I know that right well," said the druid; "for it was out of Spain itself that the race of  
the man whose spouse she shall be, went; and he shall arrive this night in Spain"  
(pp.38-9).

He instructs the king's daughter to take the lustrous coat of a salmon she finds and make it into a coat for the husband to be. The druid hears the arrival, and proclaims the sound of the wave an omen, a harbinger of the visiting king of Erinn.

<sup>69</sup> The reference Plummer cites is to the extended preface to the *Amra* proper in Stokes' edition of the 12th century Bodleian *Amra*. Its antiquity is uncertain, but in common with glosses and scholia would be later than the poem.

<sup>70</sup> *Do Fogluim Chonculainn*. Stokes (1908)120.

Plummer cites two further references to druidic prophesy as being contained in 'Magh Lena', as follows.

vii. *Tocmarc Monera (the Courtship of Monera)*. Plummer cites this work twice (as 'Magh Lena') in his section on Druidic prophesy (clxii n.6). I have included the references as further archetypal examples of Plummer's secular sources which he accumulates to describe the druids as models upon which the saints were designed, and druidic clairvoyance as the inspiration for descriptions of the saintly prophesy.

(a) The divination of Antipater, the druid out of Spain, was delivered to Eoghan by three youths, his sons. The storyteller went to order the druid to make a prophesy for the king for the fortunes of his daughter...

And the druid consulted his highest knowledge; and it was revealed to him that it was out of Caesar's island, viz, out of Erin, the spouse of his daughters should be. (154-5)

And he sends his sons as messengers to fulfil the calling and the prophesy.

(b) The king of Spain asks his druid to discover the history of the youths. The druid predicts their imminent return. (158-9).

viii. *Táin bó Cúalnge (The Cattle Raid of Cooley)*.<sup>71</sup> Again in Plummer's section on druidic prophesy he notes the following (clxii n.6):

(a) During the preparations for the raid:

When Medb came to where her druid was, she asked her foreknowledge and prophesy of him... "and find out for us whether we shall come back or not." And the druid said: "Whoever comes or comes not back, you yourself will come." (Windisch p.27, tr. O'Rahilly, pp.142-3).

(b) Later we meet a group of 'prophets':

Then came the harpers of Caínbile... they were men of great knowledge and prophesy and magic. (Wind. p.181, O'Rah. p.173).

(c) In addition to Plummer's references, we also note the following. Medb is questioning a wonderful young woman, whose skin shone through her garments.

"Who of my people are you?" said Medb. "That is not hard to tell. I am Feidelm the prophetess from Síd Chríachna." "Well then Fiedelm Prophetess, how do you see our army?" "I see red on them. I see crimson."

The question and answer is repeated five times.

And Fiedelm began to prophesy and foretell Cú Chulainn to the men of Ireland, and she chanted a lay:... (O'Rah. p.143)

(d) Medb sought knowledge of who should accompany her:

<sup>71</sup> Plummer referred to the edition of Windisch (*Irische Texte* I.IV, Leipzig 1905) which collates the *LL*, *Stowe*, *LU* and other ms versions of the *TBC*. I quote the equivalent passages in translation from C. O'Rahilly (1970).

Medb was the last of the hosts that day for she had been seeking foreknowledge and prophecy and tidings, that she might learn who was loath and who was eager to go on the expedition. (O'Rah. p.146)

(e) Later, Fergus, Cú Chulainn's foster father, has a 'keen premonition' of Cú Chulainn's arrival.

A sharp premonition of the arrival of Cú Chulainn came to Fergus and he told the men of Ireland to be on their guard... and Fergus was thus prophesying the coming of Cú Chulainn, and he made the lay and Medb answered him... (O'Rah. p.148)

(f) Cathbad the druid pronounces that a boy taking up arms that day would be famous, but short lived. Cú Chulainn takes up arms, so achieves fame. (O'Rah. p.163).

(g) In the tale proper, after the battle with Fer Diad, Cú Chulainn asks Fíngin Fáthlfaig the seer-physician to come and examine the wounds of Cethern mac Fintain. He examines nine wounds in all, identifying the attacker each time. He's asked for advice, and Fíngin gives Cethern the choice of either long illness and then help and succour, or temporary healing for vengeance. The latter chosen, Fíngin prescribes a marrow mash in which Cethern is placed for three days and three nights to cure and heal him. (O'Rah. p.236-240).

(h) The final selection from the *TBC*, with the following citation of 'The combat', concerns the *congancness*, the 'horn skin' (clxxx n.2).<sup>72</sup> Plummer describes this as making its wearer invincible. In order to counterbalance Cú Chulainn's use of the *ga bulga* (O'Rah. pp.222, 228-9), Fer Diad wore a 'horn-skin' (*congancness*) (O'Rah. pp.222, 229) to the battle on the ford. However, it does not prevent his being wounded (222-6) and eventually being slain horribly with the thirty-barbed weapon (229).

#### *ix. The combat of Cuchulaind with Senbecc.*<sup>73</sup>

In the same note, Plummer refers to a meeting of Cuchulaind and Senbecc whose cloak and shirt will fit anyone, and will prevent him from drowning or from being burnt. He also has a shield which will protect in battle or in combat.

The parallel for both these secular tales is drawn with Adomnán's tale of a spear attack by Lám Dess (Right hand), one of a company of excommunicate persecutors of churches on Hinba who intended to kill Columba:

c.f. *VC* ii.24: In order to prevent this, one of the monks, by name Findlugán, wearing

<sup>72</sup> Plummer cites Windisch pp. 439, 563. The section of the tale occurs in O'Rahilly pp. 211-234. Plummer also cites Windisch 'p.317 note' which refers to the LU version and Windisch 553, which refers to the Stowe version, p. 48a)). For discussion of the *congancness*, see *The Combat of Cuchulaind with Senbecc*.

<sup>73</sup> A fragmentary tale, ed. & tr. Kuno Meyer, *RC* 6 (1883-5) p.184.

the holy mans' cowl, came between, ready to die for him. But miraculously that garment of the blessed man, like a coat of well-fortified and impenetrable armour (*lurica*), could not be pierced even by the strong man's powerful thrust of a very sharp spear, but remained uninjured; and the man who was clad in it was shielded by that covering from hurt or harm. But the miscreant... withdrew, believing that the spear had transfixd the holy man.

The thrust of these passages appear to confirm Plummer's view that it is an example of the pagan motif of a magical 'cloak of invulnerability'.<sup>74</sup>

*b. Commentary on the earlier sources.*

There is much to stimulate discussion here, but there is perhaps an unidentified subjectivity, in addition to the now identified chronological and vector of influence problems. Plummer posits the adoption by Irish Christianity after its arrival in Ireland, of prevailing pagan religious mythology and motifs, evinced by the inclusion of such motifs in the Christian *vitae*. The pagan origin of these motifs may be determined by comparison with the secular sagas which are taken to record prePatrician (or unconverted contemporary) pagan mythology and religious practice. The inclusion of the pagan motifs from the sagas in the *vitae* thus shows that the Christians have adopted the practices, recording them as their own, as they enter the Irish milieu.

Now, as I have said, given Sharpe's variant translations in VC, I have suggested that he might be influenced by Plummer's thesis. However, in his 1991 revisiting of the three collections, Sharpe has this to say:

Plummer's interests had...strayed into mythology, an area fashionable at the time,...

Plummer's speculations on this front incurred immediate censure from reviewers when his book was published in 1910.<sup>75</sup>

Working from Sharpe's list, I will summarize the contemporary reviews of Plummer as they relate to our question, to confirm that Sharpe represents accurately the response to Plummer's thesis, and because at this remove, the reviewer's views may not be familiar. E.C.Butler(1910) does not fault the editorial work, but says of part V:

the mythologising method, so fashionable a generation ago, but now discredited in other subjects, is just now running riot in Hagiology (see the last chapter of Père Delehaye's *Légendes hagiographiques*). Mr Plummer's mythological method is of a sober kind... but ... many of them [i.e. the parallels] could be paralleled from documents where there is no reason for suspecting this influence.(490-2)

E.J.Gwynn(1912) compares the 'comparatively modest and sober' infusion of

---

<sup>74</sup> see discussion below.

<sup>75</sup> Sharpe(1995)79.



supernatural marvels in Adomnán's *Life of Columba* and the Armagh Lives of Patrick, with (the)

gross and palpable fictions which abound in the later compilations ...[in which]... as time went on... the miraculous element tended to predominate (62-81).

Gwynn goes along with much of Plummer's opinion. However, he points out [influenced by the fashionable Indo-European theory] that stories associating holy ascetes with animals, of prestige derived from mortification, and of claims upon the celestial powers are also told of Indian Fakirs. Gwynn disagrees with Plummer over the question of his assumption that the personalities of saints have been identified with pre-Christian pagan deities. He agrees that the solar may be one element in Celtic religious belief, but dissents from the view that it was established generally in Ireland at the time Christianity was introduced, and challenges Plummer's apparent preconception that solar attributes were transferred wholesale to the saints. He observes that the so-called 'solar miracles' all have perfectly orthodox biblical parallels, and indeed the whole of Irish literature of 'post-Christian origin' is full of such imitations. [Again we have the question of which belief influenced which record, and an early expression of Carney's theory.] However, Gwynn accepts wholeheartedly Plummer's posited influence of the old magic, fairies and druidism. The superstition of the former is simply transferred to new figures; saints replace sorcerers / druids; angels and demons replace fairies and evil spirits. He points out though that this is not uniquely Irish. Here he betrays his own nativism clearly. What is curious is that Gwynn does not apply the same criticism to these features as he did for the solar miracles; all the examples he gives have perfectly conventional biblical parallels, with no need to appeal to the adoption of old-faith mythologies. [The major exception to this are the stories which exhibit a counter-Christian morality, but then the members of the church have it seems never been immune from such activity; the curiosity here is that it should be recorded of saints in contexts designed to show their sanctity.] Gwynn perhaps catches the right spirit in his closing remarks:

Evidently these stories are not all meant to be taken too seriously. They are intended for entertainment as well as instruction. Even a monk must relax a little occasionally, especially if he is also an Irishman.

Van der Essen(1911)526-8 sees Plummer's rapprochements as forced, and the conclusions too sweeping, especially with respect to the solar myths. These elements are found, he says, in all ages and countries, where the substratum is, as in Ireland, the mentality of the crowd. He questions whether the mythological traits Plummer identifies as Irish do originate expressly in Ireland, asserting that they are found ubiquitously. This comment is anticipated by J.A.MacCulloch, who sounds a cautionary note: folk-tales may be inquired of, if we discriminate between what in

them is Celtic and what is universal.<sup>76</sup> Vendryes(1911)104-6 asserts the impossibility of establishing a firm theory, wondering if Plummer has applied too rigorous an interpretation of the pagan elements. The solar elements are not demonstrable, and may be a bit *out of date*. There are abundant comparisons from Hindu, Greek and Germanic mythologies. Sharpe summarises the reviews, and points to the way forward:

[Plummer's] approach to the Lives ... included a good deal of rather primitive study of what he called 'heathen folk-lore and mythology' ... In 1910 he was criticised for naïve speculations on the divine attributes of saints. That criticism may have been in some measure motivated by a desire to perceive the saints of the *uitae* in the light of an attitude to holiness and the holy life which would have been quite alien to their authors. Plummer was seen as trying to make pagan gods out of minor heroes of modern Christianity. His methods were misguided, but his recognition that the *uitae* illuminate aspects of how the authors of the *uitae* and their audience perceived the spiritual aspects of their world has still to be followed up.<sup>77</sup>

While shedding a flickering light on some of the more bizarre incidents in these lives, Plummer's thesis is challenged heavily upon the question of Irish identity of the traits he so identifies, and upon their pagan identity. He is thus challenged over the question we have identified of chronology and the vector of influence. Which came first: the Christian miracles or those in the sagas? Which influenced which? Is it possible that the earliest miracles of the earliest Irish Christian saints (or their biblical and other literary accounts of such) might have been incorporated into the oral sagas, where they could grow and develop, then be re-exported into the later *lives*? Plummer's reviewers are somewhat unfair in accusing him of exclusively imputing the traditions to the Irish milieu, as he himself makes numerous references to continental and Indian traditions. He must be correct in his assertion that the many commonplace topoi to be found in the *vitae* he publishes have been drawn from common tradition, or traditions. The question is, which tradition? His particular thesis, shared by his contemporary and subsequent hagiologists, folklorists, historians and others, (e.g. MacCulloch, Stokes, Hyde, Delahaye, Curry, Andersons, Hughes etc.), is that the marvellous therein was largely derived from the marvellous in the secular myths, sagas and folk-traditions of Ireland, which were themselves part of the wider folk tradition of Indo-European language users. As an example, the master folklorist Sean O'Sullivan(1966) says of Hyde(1900) *Legends of Saints and Sinners*:

It focussed on a pattern that had already intrigued Irish collectors, the blending of pagan

---

<sup>76</sup> MacCulloch(1911).

<sup>77</sup> Sharpe (1991) 388.

with Christian lore. St Patrick and St Peter performed wonders not unlike those credited to the ancient Tuatha de Danaan but with a moral purpose and Christian motive (xxvi).

The extent to which this thesis is supported by Plummer's evidence, a representative selection of which I present above, is dependent upon two factors. Firstly, Plummer must face the question of chronology. Do the sources he cites as evidence of pagan influence on the *Vitae* in general, and for our purpose of Adomnán in particular, present a chronological relationship with the VC to evince such influence as having occurred? Secondly there is the question of similarity of description and vector of influence. Do the narratives in the two media present a picture of the same phenomena at work? Is the similarity decisive in leading us to conclude that the phenomena so described are of the same nature and purpose, or are there differences which might suggest that while similar on a surface level, the underlying nature and purpose of the phenomena in the two media are fundamentally distinct. Even if we should conclude that the descriptions are substantially identical, does this necessarily mean that we are observing a single set of phenomena common to both genres. We have here the often voiced question of the similarities and/ or differences between the supernatural phenomena of the Judao-Christian tradition and those of other traditions, including the pagan Celtic religious tradition of the early to mid first millennium AD.<sup>78</sup> We are seeking to determine the extent to which Adomnán could be seen to have been influenced by his particular context of pagan Celtic religion, and more particularly still, by the pagan Celtic folktales represented by the survivals in the literary record as cited by Plummer in evidence of such an influence. Adomnán writes self consciously from within a Christian tradition, but was this tradition in his case 'polluted' by pagan ideas and legends, as Plummer claims, or does the tradition include such phenomena as part

---

78 e.g. see: Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984) is a survey of the discussion of miracles (both philosophical and in biblical criticism) since 17th century; G. Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1983) Part 3 Chapter 2, argues for the relative distinctiveness of the Gospel miracle stories in the ancient context; Kingsbury (*Gospel Perspectives* VI, eds Wenham and Blomberg, Sheffield 1986) argues that the era of drawing analogies between Hellenistic miracles and gospel miracles is itself drawing to a close (449). See also Hull, J.M., *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd series no.28 (SCM, London 1974); Jones, G.H., 'Primitive Magic in the Lives of the Celtic Saints,' *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion*, 1936, 69-96; Kolenkow, A.B., 'A problem of Power: How Miracle Doers Counter Charges of Magic in the Hellenistic World', in: G.MacRae (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1976 Seminar Papers: 112th Annual Meeting*, (Scholars Press, Missoula, MT 1976), 105-110; R Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles* (New York: Paulist, 1988); C.F.D. Moule ed., *Miracles* (London: Mowbray, 1965). Remus, H., 'Does Terminology Distinguish Early Christian from Pagan Miracles?' *J. Biblical Literature* 104.4 (1982), 531-551; Remus, H., *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Patristic Monograph Series No 10) (Philadelphia Patristic Foundation 1983); G H Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993);

of its corpus of belief? The last contains a further element: is there any evidence of a preceding Christian tradition, in addition to biblical and hagiographical sources, on which Adomnán could have drawn for his images as an alternative influence. Is Plummer sufficiently discerning in his identification of pagan with Christian marvellous phenomena?

*i. Chronology.*

I will record the dating information available to Plummer for each of the sources I cite, plus more recent work in this regard.

*Táin bó Cúalnge*.<sup>79</sup> MS: The *LL* MS, is thought to have been originally written around 1100, and compiled by 1160.<sup>80</sup> Recension 1 is contained in *Leabhar na h-Uidre*, compiled by the second half of the 11th century.<sup>81</sup> Windisch argues that parallels drawn between the *Táin*'s presentation of the early Irish milieu and that of Gaul and Britain during the Roman invasion produce a date of 2nd-1st century BC for the setting of the sagas. This suggests a consequent oral transmission of some 650 years. Ridgeway placed it in the 1st century AD. Jackson makes the tale pure fiction, notes that any documentation cannot go back earlier than the 5th century AD (i.e. Irish advent of Christian writing), but that the tales reached the form in which they are preserved by the 4th century. They were written first in the mid 7th century, and had thus been transmitted orally for around 300 years in their settled form.<sup>82</sup> The end of Ulaid dominance, and thus of the period of the tales, is the 5th century destruction of Emain Macha by Tara.<sup>83</sup> Cecile O'Rahilly re-asserts ultimate oral inspiration, though she does not date this, leaving open the question of its chronological relationship to the Christian mission.<sup>84</sup> Carney sees the earliest compilation of *TBC* (*Recension I*) as 'based to a large extent on eighth- or ninth-century material'<sup>85</sup> archaisms may be traced which can be dated around AD 600 or earlier.<sup>86</sup> He takes an intermediate view, proposing the saga as partly traditional, with the balance being imaginative reconstruction of the remote pagan past in the form of the mixed culture of early

79 Recent surveys of scholarly opinion may be found in C. O'Rahilly *TBC* (1970); Carney (1983) 114-117; J.P. Mallory, ed., *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast 1992) and idem., *Ulidia* (Belfast 1995).

80 Chadwick(1971) 263, 270.

81 Ó Concheannain(1996)65.

82 Jackson(1964)44f.

83 Chadwick(1971) 267.

84 O'Rahilly(1970) xiii.

85 Carney (1983)113.

86 *ibid.* pp.117-122. Carney notes *Conailla Medb míchuru*, one of these (indirect) sources, 'unquestionably the oldest source' of *TBC*. He suggests it's author's claimed 'ancient knowledge' is at least a century older than the writer's own day (<600AD), thus bringing the tradition of *TBC* 'almost to the brink of the pagan period' (122).



Christian Ireland. He thus sees the saga as historical fiction, with an oral tradition to the seventh century and a skeletal historicity.<sup>87</sup>

*Immram Maíle Dáin*. MS: The earliest MS preservation is *Lebor na hUidre*, (RIA Dublin), written ca. 1100. Ó Concheannan has recently argued for a date earlier in the 11th century. Kenney (p.411 n.144) follows Zimmer in dating the origin of the tale before the (9th century) Brendan legend, but believes the extant text has 're-borrowed' from Brendan. Chadwick dates the story from the 10th century, based probably on an 8th century original.<sup>88</sup> Oskamp believes it was not in its present form before the ninth century, though it has roots in the pre-Viking survivals in *Immram Bran*.<sup>89</sup> The setting is Christian, though of uncertain date.

*Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* (OCU). The text Plummer refers to is edited and translated by Whitley Stokes (1887) from the Glenn Masain MS, probably written in the 15th century. Hull (1949) and Mac Giolla Léith (1993) are the latest editions with a full history of the collection of tales gathered around The Dierdre Story. Mac Giolla Léith believes there are two separate traditions (19). The earliest version of these, an early Irish saga *Longes mac nUislenn* is in the mid-12th century *Book of Leinster* (ca.1160) (Hull 1949:29-32). Under this title it is listed among the chief tales (*prímscéla*) which LL (189a, 190b) says a poet is bound to know. Thus, we have firm evidence of the tale's importance by the 12th century, and firm indications that, in view of its inclusion in the *prímscéla*, it has a more ancient origin. Composition is dated to the late eighth / early ninth centuries, making it the earliest love-story in Irish literature.

*Cath Finntrága*. Plummer used Meyer's 1885 edition. The oldest extant version of the tale is preserved in Bodleian MS *Rawl. B487ff* 1-11, dated 15th century. Meyer states:

No mention of it is found in older Irish literature, and thus it is likely that... the origin of the story itself must *not* be referred back to a much earlier date than that of its oldest MS. Indeed the language of the text plainly shows that it cannot have been copied from a much older MS. (viii-ix, my emphasis).

---

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* pp.116-7. 'The Christian writers of the tales might themselves have imported features of Greek/Teutonic heroic culture to enrich the history of their adopted nation, and to emphasize the contrast of the old pagan with the new Christianised culture. In other words, they were writing a creative 'history' against which to view the new civilisation.' Footnote written prior to reading Thurneyson, Carney & McCone, now confirmed by them, showing how an independent consideration of the evidence can arrive at similar conclusions.

<sup>88</sup> Chadwick (1971) 281.

<sup>89</sup> Oskamp (1970) 4.



O'Rahilly, in contrast, suggests that though B487 contains no archaisms itself, the tale must have existed in some form by the 12th century from evidence in *Accallam na Senorach*.<sup>90</sup> She believes it to be 'a deliberate literary composition...later taken into folk tradition.'<sup>91</sup> Stokes suggests the origin of many of these stories is in the classics *Togail Troy (sic)* and *Merugud Uiliux (sic)*, as they were translated into Irish in the 12th century, and the stories passed from there into Irish literature.

*Cath Maige Tuired*. Plummer cited Stokes 1891 edition. This chief saga of the Mythological cycle<sup>92</sup> is taken from MS Harl 5280 (B.Mus), and is described by the editor as being of 15th century. Stokes argues from linguistic evidence that its composition must be later than ninth century, possibly 14th century, but certainly during or following Scandinavian occupation. Chadwick believes the language is probably as early as the ninth century.<sup>93</sup> Gray(1982) followed by McCone(1989, 136) concur that there is no reason to suppose it was composed before the ninth century.

*Dindshenchas*. Stokes believed the MS was probably written in the 14th or 15th centuries, but the collection may have been made in the 11th or 12th. An earlier copy exists in *LL* (mid 12th century).<sup>94</sup>

*Tocmarc Monera*. Plummer cites this saga as 'Magh Lena'. The references cited in fact refer to the second piece published in the volume, which, although it is part of the same cycle as Magh Leana, and shares characters and activity, is a distinct work, with different chronology. The text of the *Courtship of Monera* here cited is taken from the MS preserved in the *Leabhar Buide Lecan (Yellow Book of Lecan: 4.2.16 - Col.3(c), T.C.D.)* which was compiled in 1391. Curry states 'The composition of this tract is certainly much older than the date of the book in which it is preserved.' I have no other dating information.<sup>95</sup>

90 Cecile O'Rahilly, *Cath Finntrágha*, x.

91 *ibid.*, xviii.

92 Chadwick(1971)265.

93 *ibid.*, 171.

94 Stokes (1894), *Dinnsenchus*, 272. Other copies listed are in *Bk Ballymote* (end 14th century); *YBL*; *Rawl B406*; *Ed.* The latter are undated in this edition.

95 Curry notes a reference in the *Cath Muige Léana* (note, p.72/3) of a precise reference to 'Cross days', prohibited days in the calendar: 'For it is certain that the calculations of the moon and of nature said that it was a lucky conjuncture with a seventh...' (referring to druids choosing a particular day for advance) .74/5 continues: 'But one thing is certain now: knowledge was concealed from their prophets, on this occasion, and delusive omens were presented to their diviners; and fortune hardened their senses; and pride deceived their understandings; and anger and inordinate ambition intoxicated their chiefs.' Eoghan's action ended in disaster. The point of interest here is that the origin of Cross days is thought to be given, according to Curry, in TCD vellum MS H.2.16, where they are recorded as relating to various biblical events. Curry cites for

'*The Combat of Cuchulaind with Senbecc*'. MS: From Stowe MS 992 fo.50b. Meyer believes it was written around the end of the 14th century.

*Da Choca's Hostel*. (cited below) MS ed. & tr. Whitley Stokes, *RC* 21, pp.154-5. MS: The MSS are TCD H.3.18 (16th century) and H.1.17 (17th century).

*Cath Maighe Léna*.<sup>96</sup> The text of *Cath Maighe Léna* cited by Plummer is taken from a 17th century paper MS (Hodges & Smith, RIA, No.104). Jackson produced the modern edition (1938). He notes that the earliest MSS belong to the long recension, MS 'F' is dated 1554-1558 (ix). Though there are some survivals from Middle Irish, its early modern Irish makes it, 'It is not easy to date the tale more nearly' than late 13th-early 14th century.

*Do Fogluim Chonculainn*. MS: Taken from the oldest extant MS, Egerton 106, written 1715.

The available data is collected in the table below:

| Source                 | Earliest MS  | Earliest written composition |
|------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| Táin bó Cúalnge        | AD 1100      | 7th century                  |
| Immram Maíle Dúin      | AD 1100      | 8th century                  |
| OCU                    | AD 1160      | 8/9th century                |
| Cath Finntrága         | 15th century | 12th century                 |
| Cath Maige Tuired      | 15th century | 9-14th century               |
| Dindshenchas           | 12th century | -                            |
| Tocmarc Monera         | AD 1391      | 'older'                      |
| The combat             | 14th century | -                            |
| Da Choca's hostel      | 16th century | -                            |
| Cath Maighe Léna       | 17th century | 13th century                 |
| Do Fogluim Chonculainn | AD 1715      | -                            |

What is clear is that none of the saga materials Plummer cites has a manuscript source earlier than the 12th century. None has a firm suggested codification earlier than the

---

example Dec.13th as the day 'Judas was born that betrayed Christ.' This is an example of the Christian composition of the saga materials. The oral saga may have been written by Christian scribes who interpolated a Christian chronological concept to explain the druids' failure, or the saga could have been composed de novo, using the motif anachronistically.

96 O'Curry(1855).

seventh century.<sup>97</sup> This is not to say that the tales did not exist before Adomnán wrote his *Life of Columba*, but (with the exception of *TBC*) we have no evidence on which to base any putative use he might be thought to have made of any such source. The *Táin* furnishes intriguing possibilities, depending so much upon its date of composition. If, as Jackson asserts, its final form was achieved in the 4th century, and it was written in the mid-7th century, there is reason to argue that Adomnán could have known it, and that he could have been influenced by it. However, Carney (1955) has demonstrated that it was the *VC* which influenced at least the written version of *TBC*, the reverse vector from that suggested by Plummer. The *Voyage of Mael Dúine's Boat*, a Christian tale, though Stokes does not like the morality, may originate in the 8th century. The probability must be that any influence would have been from *VC* to it.<sup>98</sup> The remaining sources cited by Plummer are of such remote chronologically from *VC* that any similarities in style of description cease to have bearing in making them evidence for pagan influence on Adomnán. There is thus no unquestionable chronological evidence from the manuscripts that Adomnán had any written secular tradition from which to draw his mirabilia.

*ii. Similarity of description and vector of influence.*

The probability that the scribes would have been Christian monks seeking to record entertaining tales, probably under the patronage of a local ruler, makes it likely that Christian supernatural topoi could have been interpolated into the tales as they were codified, if not before as they were told around monastic refectory tables. *VC* shows how far the Christian imagination was prepared to be entertained, with stories such as the teleporting bachall (ii14); the beast of River Ness (ii27); and the magic stake (ii37)

<sup>97</sup> see Carney (1983) 127. He says some sagas might be seen as having been written in the earliest period of Irish literature. However, he states that 'most of our saga material belongs' to 'the end of the seventh century onwards' in a 'period of revision and new creation', 'part of a constant policy in early Irish monastic schools of revising early traditions for either religious or political reasons'. Carney admits his *Studies* was written in reaction to the domination of prevailing orthodoxies regarding the date of Patrick and the nature of early Irish saga. However, he maintains and reinforces his view (with Thurneyson and Miles Dillon) that the *Iliad* influenced the seventh or eighth century compilation of *TBC* (128-130). This influence is noteworthy to our present debate in that firstly it continues to reinforce the criticism of Plummer being to ready to attribute to Irish sagas what are universal marvellous features. Secondly, it traces (at least some) marvellous influence on the Irish sagas to the same Greek milieu from which Christianity fought to distinguish itself from its inception onwards. Marvels formed an integral part of first century Palestinian world-view. However, Christians, from the model of their founder, did not, and would not accept that the marvellous aspects of their faith and practice cohered with pagan magic. (e.g. Origen *Contra Celsum*, etc.) This distinction is still evident in the *VC*. It makes the possibility of blind adoption of pagan magic in the work of so eminent an author as Adomnán improbable.

<sup>98</sup> The identity of the woman who foreknows the arrival of the voyagers may be worth investigating here; it should be noted that Columba is not the only individual described as acting 'supernaturally' in *VC*.

which have perhaps less than obvious Christian origin. Could it not be that extant secular hero tales could have been fertilized by an imagination fed by constant daily exposure to the Christian scriptures and other Christian literary traditions? We will compare the phenomena under the three headings in which the parallels of Plummer fall: prophecy, healing and cloak of invulnerability. These three coincide with phenomena detailed in the first two books of the *VC*.

*(a) Christian vs. Druidic Prophecy*

Using Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, and the examples of prophecy there presented as a paradigm we will attempt a critical investigation of the viability of Plummer's links. I hope to demonstrate that Adomnán's description owes nearly everything to Christian tradition, and little which is identifiably, or necessarily, of pre-Christian paganism. First, then, we must identify any available characteristics of pagan Celtic prophecy against which to compare Adomnán. As we have seen, Plummer includes various references to druidic prophecy in the *VSH*:

Rhys' tradition is cited as evidence of the presence of the phenomenon of 'second sight' in Celtic folklore. It could reflect the continuation of a pagan phenomenon such as that postulated by Plummer as an influence on the Christian writers, representing a pagan tradition with which the Christian tradition had to deal as it developed.<sup>99</sup> However, Plummer concedes that Adomnán's and others' accounts of seeing the whole world, one example of the phenomenon, were probably influenced by 'our Lord's temptation on the mount, Luke 4.5' (clxxi n.10). While reasonable at first sight, a problem here is that the biblical incident is enabled by Satanic, not Divine power, whereas Columba is described as being empowered by God:

And the *devil* took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time... (Luke 4:5).

...this holy man of the Lord...in some speculations made *with divine favour* the scope of his mind was miraculously enlarged, and he saw plainly, and contemplated, even the whole world as it were caught up in one ray of the sun. (*VC* i.1, 10b, my italics.)

Adomnán makes it clear that this gift is analogous to that written of by Paul, who told '...of such visions revealed to himself...' (*VC* i.43: 45a). The tradition of revelatory vision was clearly, from *VC*, an important feature of Columba's life to emphasize. We may conjecture, in contrast to Plummer, that the secular tradition in Rhys could perhaps have its origin in the Christian prophetic tradition, the description of which

---

<sup>99</sup> This is the familiar controversy in Ecclesiastical history, from biblical accounts of Apostolic dealings with magicians, through Origen's refutation of Celsus' accusations, and so on. See note 75 above.



has developed over time to its emergence as a rather different phenomenon in Rhys' tale. The early church practice of the laying on of hands for the empowering of the Holy Spirit could even be postulated as the origin of the touch conveying the power to 'see' magically, as the story of Simon the *magus* shows, e.g:

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:18-19).<sup>100</sup>

Again, in the reference to foreknowledge of the arrival or safe return of visitors *Immram*. p.490; *Do Fogluim*. p.120, *Maighe Léna*, p.39 *Tocmarc*. p.158-9, we have no need to look any further than the Bible to find adequate precedent for prophetic knowledge of the arrival of guests in VC:

And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them." And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?". (Acts 10:19-21).

In *TBC* the foreknowledge of Medb's druid (*O'Rahilly* p.142) parallels that of Columba in its directness, and even in the manner of asking, see for instance VC i.15: King Roderic of Strathclyde sends to ask Columba if he will be slain by enemies or not. Columba said he would not. However, other instances in *TBC* where riddle or poetic lay-forms of prophecy are given show a distinctively different style and influence in play. Given a seventh century codification of the *TBC*, during which century the prophecies of Columba were themselves being codified by Ségeine and Cumméne, the possibility of an influence from the Columba tradition, rather than the reverse, is perfectly feasible. The embellishments in prophetic style given to the druids in the *Táin*, not seen for Columba in the VC, act as confirmation of this revised direction of influence. Thus *TBC* retains traditional elements, while elements from the Judao-Christian tradition are added by its Christian scribes. The prophesy of Colum Cille's arrival (*O'Rahilly* p.173) suggests either a post Colum Cille (i.e post 6th century) composition, or Christian interpolation. The Christian colophon appended to the tale in *LL* (*O'Rahilly* p.272) is of special interest in the context of this investigation. Here we see firm evidence of both the copyists rejection of the mythological phenomenology of the tale as either demonic deception, or poetic figments, and thus of his own acceptance of a cosmology which coincides with that of Adomnán. We can observe his own awareness of a differentiation between the pagan

100 Touch is also important in Num Deut 34.9; Mtt 9.21//, 14.36//; Mk 6.56, 8.22, 10.13//, Lk 6.19, Acts 9.17; 19.6 etc



magic tales he records, and the non-figmentary, non-demonic mirabilia with which we must presume he is contrasting them.

*The death of the sons of Uisnech (sic)* <sup>101</sup> records the following prophetic actions:

And Fergus sent forth a mighty cry in the harbour, so that it was heard throughout the farthest part of the districts that were nearest to them (156).

He sends out three such cries, and the third identifies him to Dierdre, who had had a vision the night before:

to wit, three birds came to us out of Emain Macha; and three sips of honey they had in their bills, and those three sips they left with us, and with them they took three sips of our blood.

She explains to Naisi the meaning:

Fergus has come from our own native land with peace; for not sweeter is honey than a (false man) message of peace; and the three sips of blood that have been taken from us, they are ye who will go with him, and ye will be beguiled.

The first section of quotation is reminiscent of Columba's miraculous voice (VC i.37), which (see chapter IV) is one sign of a prophet in the Fathers.<sup>102</sup> This in itself might indicate Christian influence on the secular saga. However the poetic metaphorical style of the prophesy is wholly unlike the straightforward un-veiled language Adomnán records for Columba's prophesies. Indeed it is more reminiscent of Samson's riddle in Judges 14. It must therefore be unlikely that this tale could have been an influence on Adomnán, if it existed in his time, for which we have no evidence. Thus this reference is further evidence for the difference in prophetic style recorded of the druids being based on an OT hero figure.

A second additional example can be observed in *Da Choca's Hostel*. (Plummer, clxii n.6):

11. Now the wizards (*druid*) were foreboding evil and uttering ill omens to Cormac mac Usnech. They declared that the journey would be neither easy nor speedy.

In Druim Airthir, they saw a 'red woman' wanting her chariot:

15...When she lowered her hand, the bed of the river became red with gore and with blood. But when she raised her hand over the river's edge, not a drop therein but was

101 Stokes(1887), *Irish Texts* 2.2, 109f. Plummer also cites *Oitite (sic)* 14 & 22 (Meyer's 1906 edition) (clxii.7 & clxviii.1) as examples of druidic prophecy of Christ's coming, plainly a Christian interpolation, and of druidic floods.

102 e.g. Ignatius to the Philadelphians, VII, 'I spake with a loud voice, with the voice of God...but it was the Spirit who kept preaching in these words.' (J.H.Strawley, *Epistles of St Ignatius*, 3rd ed., p.86). *Oided* 153, line 19 says: 'And conchobar uplifted his loud king's voice on high...' This is an example of the loud voice of authority, which may derive from Patristic ideas on prophecy

lifted on high; so that they went dryfoot over the bed of the river.

16... then, standing on one foot, and with one eye closed, she chanted to them saying... "I was the ? of a king who will perish"... (154-5)

Again, Plummer does not give any parallels in *VC*. However it is possible to discern in the story of the red woman a set of images strongly suggested by the biblical story of Moses and the Pharaoh's *magi*, an influence Plummer himself suggests elsewhere (clxvi); of Israel crossing the Red Sea (Ex.14.16, 21-22); or of Joshua and the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 3.13-17). This clear biblical influence confirms McCone's view of this saga being influenced by biblical borrowing, mediated via *Scéla Muicc Da Thó* (1990, 32).

These passages<sup>103</sup> demonstrate both some of the similarities and the differences between the accounts of druidic prophesy and that of Columba. Common elements include the foretelling of the conditions of a journey (c.f. *VC* i.4, 5, 6, 19, 20, 45, 47, ii.42); the use of a hand movement in demonstration of power (c.f. *VC* ii.2, 11, 12, 28, 29, 31, 35); foreboding evil and uttering ill omens (c.f. *VC* ii.22-25). At the same time there are distinct differences. Foreknowledge of a husband (*Tocmarc*) is not seen in *VC* (cf. book of Ruth). The style of ecstasy in *VC* appears markedly different, with Adomnán giving the impression of a quiet, uninduced state, which he parallels with Paul's being taken to the third heaven, though druidic frenzy<sup>104</sup> has clear OT archetypes (1Sam10 & 19). The gore is prominent in the sagas (but not absent in OT prophesy cf. Isa 34.6). A peculiar posture is adopted (one eye closed could derive from Mk 9.47. They made claims of 'highest knowledge' (*Tocmarc* pp.154-5) or 'great knowledge' (*TBC* p.173) (cf. Num 24.16). The skin of the druid shining through the garment (cf. Moses and the transfigured Christ). The druid chants a lay rather than Columba's plain talk, and prophesies in obscure riddles (*TBC* p.143) (cf. OT prophets poetic oracles). Different features less easy to trace biblical imagery in include no source of druidic prophesy is declared other than druidic ability, though again those who practice divination in OT (Deut 18.14) have no source attributed; and charms termed 'path protection' delivered with prophesy of safe return, (*Maighe Léna* p.36-7),<sup>105</sup> as distinct from standard prayers for safety, though the evolution from prayer to charm

103 and see *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin*, p.490; *Cath Muige Léana*, pp.37, 39; *Tocmarc Monera*, pp.155, 159; *Do Fogluim Chonculainn*, p.120; *TBC*, pp.142-8, 173, all cited above.

104 cf. MacCulloch(1911)247.

105 Curry mentions a path protection poem attributed to Columba (*Misc. Ir. Arch. Soc.*), also cited by Plummer here, and a number of what he calls 'Latin Coimghi' (TCD Class, B.3.17, page 672). The latter is a conventional Trinitarian prayer with an Irish legend naming it an 'encircling Safeguard of the Angel'. This illustrates a possible amalgamation of tradition; the Irish pagan encircling, and a Christian prayer for help. It would appear to be the Irish legend which turns it into an automatic charm, rather than a supplicatory prayer.

is straightforward. Though Plummer cites these tales as evidence for the pagan influence on the *vitae*, closer examination suggests influence may have flowed in the reverse direction.

A possible avenue for elucidating an explanation for Adomnán's preoccupation with the prophetic is suggested by the context of the struggle with the clairvoyant powers and consequent influence of the *magus*. Is he seeking to show Columba as the more powerful seer, free of the need for the druid's mummery, and representative of the true God rather than the shady world of the *Síde*? For Adomnán, direct encounters are with a *maleficus* (ii17), with the *magi* (i37c) and Broichan, the *magus* of the King of Picts (ii33-4). Indirect challenges also occur (ii11, 32). All are in Pictland. The encounter is not about who is the more powerful prophet, but who is more powerful in the ability to perform miracles (with a possible exception in 137c where the *magi* seek to prevent the *gentiles populi* hearing the praises of the brothers). Adomnán is concerned to distinguish Columba's divinely sourced power from that of the magic of the *magi*, and thus shows himself as both aware of the accusation, and concerned to correct any reader's mistaken view, that Columba is a magician.<sup>106</sup> He is the one who brings true salvation, who carries the power of the true God. That pagan adherents should follow Christ is the object. Patrick is presented as mortal enemy of the *magi* in the seventh century lives. Plummer records that Patrick's biographer makes prophecy the *magi's* chief function. (*V.Tr.* p.273), and acknowledges biblical influence. Testing this thesis would require an assessment of the prevailing influence of the *magus* in Ireland and Scotland in both Columba and Adomnán's times. This detailed analysis has yet to be attempted, and may prove problematic in the light of Carney. We may be seeing druidic character fashioned according to the model of the intransigent Pharisee of the gospels.

If Adomnán is not influenced detectably by the prophetic in the sagas, where might other influences come from? Apart from the Druidic, three traditions of prophecy may be outlined on which Adomnán could reasonably have modelled his description of Columba, and, indeed, on which Columba could have modelled his ministry. The first are the early Hebrew prophets, Moses, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. These are presented in an often personally-directed, miracle-working narrative form. Adomnán's references to Elijah and Elisha, with his known use of Gregory's Dialogues which make the same links, suggests an adoption of Gregory's ideas of prophecy, particularly as he adopts Gregory's explanation of Benedict's gift of the knowledge of

---

106 c.f. *VSH*, cxxxiv; 'Christian teachers never took the line of denying (pre-Aryan magic) existence. It was gentile or diabolic knowledge, powerfully ranged against themselves...'

remote happenings.<sup>107</sup> However, Adomnán has been selective in his allusions to Elijah, Elisha, and Moses to coincide with his recording Columba as an example of a prophet in the New Testament, and Patristic model, dealing by and large with individual, local and immediate situations. A second group would be the more 'political preaching prophets' whose writings and records are dominated by poetic oracles of judgment or promise for the Jewish nation, but whose personal works are much less recorded. The third group are from the Christian era, and include Jesus of Nazareth, the Apostles, and others operating in the *charisma* of prophecy.<sup>108</sup> From this division, we can observe quickly that Adomnán sees Columba as identifying strongly with the first and third type of prophet.

The immediately striking character of the instances of the prophetic Adomnán records is their application in the main to individual persons as distinct from groups such as families, tribes, or 'nations'. Adomnán never employs what Von Rad calls the 'messenger formula'<sup>109</sup> in which a prophet delivers a message prefaced by the 'thus says the Lord' formula so characteristic of the later OT prophets who saw themselves as acting as ambassadors for God. Did Adomnán see Columba as such an ambassador? It seems not in this way, though as we shall see, he certainly saw him as one through whom God revealed His divine will and knowledge, though primarily for individuals not 'nations'. There is no collective eschatological view here either, i.e. for the whole nation / people / *cenél*, and thus little in the way of the sort of testamentary deposit left by many OT prophets intended to be read in time to come, or to be recognised in retrospect as prophetic to a nation in its fulfilment.<sup>110</sup> Adomnán has not recorded such testimonies either because it did not suit his purpose in writing, or, possibly more likely, because Columba never delivered such. This was not his role as a post incarnation prophet, though it would be a style Adomnán (or Columba) could reasonably have adopted, given the putative advantages such pronouncements could have had in the political situation of the day. There could have been prophecies of judgment over the more southerly Irish or British who threatened dynasties favourable to Iona; or, if Picard's argument relating to competition with Armagh is to be adopted, such prophecy against the competitors. Given Adomnán's advantage of a century of hindsight, it would have been simple in the extreme to include prophecy on Columba's

107 see VC 1.43b; Gregory, *Dial* 2.35 & 4.7. Note also the earlier less developed account in A VA 34&59, and chapter 4 below.

108 including prophets of the early church up to Columba's day? We know Iona was familiar with the scriptures and some Patristic writings, but not how known accounts of post-biblical prophets were; see chapter 5.

109 Gerhard Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, (London: SCM 1968)18f.

110 Von Rad(1968) 24.



lips promising success to groups who showed signs of 'divine blessing' as their history unfolded to Adomnán's day. In actual fact, such prophecy as is recorded with a putative political function appears to have no propagandist character. It appears rather to record the bald truth of the historical development, with no obvious advantage to Iona, or Columba's repute as a pronouncer of divine curse or blessing. He is presented rather as a neutral who spoke God's foreknowledge as and when God chose so to reveal, and to human view perhaps rather arbitrary in selection of subject. It is this neutrality which lends weight to the argument that Adomnán was including known stories simply to illustrate the life and ministry of this man of God, rather than that he had some more subtle political purpose. This observation also helps us to understand the often heard comment on the uniquely special nature of VC; the main axe it is grinding is that of an evangelist cutting through political and geographical divisions to bring the unifying power of the Kingdom of God into being wherever and with whomever it is received. It also helps us to assess these stories as reflective of a genuine tradition of prophecy in the Ionan church, against which to compare the 'pagan' equivalents.

*(b) Healing:*

The tale of Eochaid from the *Dindshenchas* confirms the presence of healing motifs in the secular literature. We might ask if the background to this late tale may be the Christian tradition of healing wells, rather than the pagan tradition referred to in Adomnán. In the case of *The Battle of Vintry* //VC ii.11, we confirmed a clear parallel between the two works, but is Adomnán betraying pagan influence in his thinking here? Plummer believed this was 'one of the departments in which the Christianisation of localities and customs originally heathen can be most clearly traced.'<sup>111</sup> Certainly this story is a good example of such a process under way. Sharpe says,

While the worship of the well is condemned here, both this story and the previous one demonstrate that Adomnán approved the continuous reverence for miraculous holy wells. Pagan well worship was easily transmuted into Christian practice, and still continues....<sup>112</sup>

It is important to note what Adomnán actually says here:

[Columba] heard that the fame of another well was widespread among the heathen populace, and that the insensate [stupid] people venerated it as a god, the devil deluding their understanding [blinding their senses].<sup>113</sup>

<sup>111</sup> VSH, cxlix.

<sup>112</sup> Sharpe (1995) n.234, following Reeves (1857) 119, n.b.

<sup>113</sup> *audiens in plebe gentili de alio fonte deuulgari fanam, quem quasi deum stolidi homines diabulo*



He describes the causation of infirmities on touching the water as devilish art (*daemonica arte*), but permitted by God, and continues: 'Led astray by all this, the heathen gave honour to the well as to a god.'<sup>114</sup> On learning this, Columba engages in a spiritual power encounter, expelling demons from the well by, 'raising holy hand in invocation of the name of Christ.' He washes and drinks, and the well is transformed. As Sharpe observes, Adomnán condemns the worship of the well. He uses fairly strong language in so doing, and is careful twice to condemn treating the well as a god, and worshipping a god in it. It would thus be inconsistent were we to interpret his words regarding the healing properties of the water after Christ's cleansing as implying that he approved of its continued worship, albeit under new management. He condemns well worship as a product of devilish deception, and shows himself acutely aware of the different tradition in which he stands compared to this heathen practice, which has been here defeated as the restoring values of the kingdom of Christ are established, repelling destructive demonic deceit. The well is not described as now inhabited by Christ, or Columba, but as a place where the healing power of the kingdom in which they operate may be accessed. Adomnán is more careful in his use of language than to allow the well to be worshipped in its newly cleansed state.

Now the question as to Adomnán's taking up of what looks like a pagan motif, the healing well, remains to be answered. We see in the preceding discussion that he demonstrates acute awareness of the different tradition in which he walks, and he has a straightforward ancestor for his story of Columba's action in one of the models on which his presentation of his hero is based, namely Elisha:

Now the men of the city said to Elisha, "Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful." He said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it, and said, "Thus says the LORD, I have made this water wholesome; henceforth neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it." So the water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word which Elisha spoke. (2 Kings 2:19-22).

The precise vehicle adopted to convey God's healing, and the state of the afflicted people are different, but the problem well and the outcome are the same. We know Adomnán had Elisha in mind as he composed his portrait of Columba from VC ii.32. Thus, while Adomnán may be seen to confirm the existence of the pagan practice of well-worship in his era, his story can be seen to have a clear source in his own

---

*eorum obcaecante sensus uenerabantur* (VC 61b).

114 *Ob quae omnia seducti gentiles diuinum fonti deferebant honorem.* (VC 61b).

tradition, a tradition which was in his day consciously exposing pagan practice as satanically inspired, and thus to be exposed and defeated. The record of the process in the VC thus identifies a function of the life in recording a success of the new faith in eclipsing paganism.

(c) *Cloak of invulnerability:*

In the case of parallels with VC ii.24 in *The Combat of Cuchulaind with Senbecc* and the *Táin* we noted Plummer's view that these are examples of the pagan motif of a magical 'cloak of invulnerability'. The picture conveyed is thus of a physical vestment normally worn by the saint (or hero/magician in secular tales) which, by virtue of its ownership is imbued with a magical protective quality. Plummer talks of the analogy with the *congancness*, lit. 'horn-skin'. Thus Adomnán wishes to portray the saint as superseding the pagan hero and he, rather undiscerningly, borrows the vestment from the back of a secular hero in circulation at his time, and places it straight onto the shoulders of his own hero Columba. This is a clear example of Plummer's hypothesis as applied to VC, and a potentially serious indictment of Adomnán's discernment of what he thought may be allowable as a Christian motif of power and authority.<sup>115</sup> However, there may be an alternative interpretation that could be applied in Adomnán's defence. His description of the putative *congancness* is as follows:

Findlugán, wearing his [Columba's] cowl, came between, ready to die for him. But miraculously that garment of the blessed man, like a coat of well-fortified and impenetrable armour [*munitissima et inpenetrabilis lurica*], could not be pierced even by a strong man's powerful thrust of a very sharp spear, but remained uninjured; and he [Findlugán] that was clad in it was shielded by that covering [*munimentum*] from hurt or harm.<sup>116</sup>

In Ephesians 6.14, the Vulgate reads: '*State ergo...induti lorica[m] justitiae,*' ( 'Stand therefore...clad in a breastplate of righteousness'). We know Adomnán was familiar with this passage from his reference to 'the armour of the apostle Paul' in VC iii.8. The context of this phrase is a passage concerning armour to be worn to resist the devil's tactics (Eph. 6.10), and Paul uses the metaphor of conventional Roman body

115 Ó Floinn(1997)149-150 notes the continuation and development of the tradition concerning Columba's cloak, or cowl, *cochall*. This relic gained the reputation of magical protective powers. Fragments of cloth possibly linked survived to 1814, but were subsequently lost, and are thus unavailable for radiometric dating. Clancy(1997b)22 avers the substantial destruction of the *cochall* in the 16th century. That such a legend developed later is not material to the origin of the tradition as discussed above, but nor is it entirely out of harmony with a biblical tradition that includes such tales as the healing handkerchief of St Paul (Acts 19.12).

116 *Findlughanus ... mori paratus pro sancto uiro cucula eius indutus intercessit. Sed mirum in modum, beati uiri tale uestimentum quasi quaedam munitissima et inpenetrabilis lurica. quamlibet fortis uiri forti impulsione acutioris hastae, transfigi non potuit, sed inlessum permansit. Et qui eo indutus erat intactus et incolomis tali protectus est munimento.* (VC 72a)

armour for his description of spiritual armour, representing the protective strength of the power of God to resist such satanic assault. In the VC tale under discussion, the malefactor is described as being 'prompted by the devil' into his attack on Columba. He is also called a 'strong man' (...*fortis uir*). Given the reference to the prompting of the devil this might conceivably carry a metaphorical meaning: The evangelists' accounts of the riposte of Christ to the Pharisees as he was accused of casting out demons by Beelzebul includes the phrase:

Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? (Mt 12:29 // Mk 3:27 // Lk 11:21.)<sup>117</sup>

In this parabolic usage, the strong man is Satan.<sup>118</sup> Thus in Adomnán's story, the spear thrust comes as an assault of Satan on Columba, but an assault which fails on account of the *lurica*.

A further conjecture with bearing on the question is that the immediate sequel to the biblical discourse on the strong man is a warning against blaspheming the Holy Spirit, by whom Christ claims he cast out demons. Adomnán consistently portrays Columba as a bearer of this same Spirit,<sup>119</sup> and as we have been discussing, this section might have reference to the Pauline armour of God, which enables its wearer to resist spiritual attack. Thus we may discern the assault by Satan, using Lam Dess as his instrument, upon the bearer of the Spirit. This acts out in cameo the persecution of the church, as bearer of the Spirit, by the the spiritual powers of darkness,<sup>120</sup> here encountered working through the human agency of the sons of Conall Domnall. For this blasphemy against the Spirit, which is not forgiven, (Mt 12.31//), Lam Dess suffers judgment a year later, as Adomnán recounts. It cannot be certain that Adomnán would have been familiar with this application of his phrase *uir fortis*, though with his description of the prompting of Lam Dess by the devil, it is tempting. Findlugán is described as *cucula eius indutus* (clad in the covering / cap / cowl) of the holy man,<sup>121</sup> and that this vestment represented a miraculous most protective and impenetrable *lurica*. We may thus have two new alternative possibilities open. The tale may have begun as a reference to the armour of Paul, originally of a spiritual battle

117 Vulg.: *Aut quomodo potest quisquam intrare in domum fortis ... nisi prius alligaverit fortem?*

118 Jerome uses the term *fortis* as a substantive, while Adomnán adds a subject, thus his phrase is not clearly derivative. However, Adomnán is clearly rendering the sense of the metaphor, while using a different construction.

119 See my section on this feature of the VC, chapter 4.

120 'For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.' (Ephesians 6:12)

121 There is a relic called a cochall (e.g. cowl/shell) from later in the Iona tradition, cf. Ó Floinn in Bourke(1997), or Clancy(1997).

as in VC iii.8, but now transformed into a physical encounter. Alternatively, it may be an account of a tradition that the spiritual armour described by Paul was wielded so effectively by Columba as to provide protection against satanically driven physical assault. Indeed the protective power of the holy man's divine *lurica* could be appropriated by a third party, for it is the companion of Columba, the monk Findlugán,<sup>122</sup> who put on the protective covering of Columba's breastplate of righteousness, and so was protected from harm. Assuming Adomnán is differentiating between 'the man who was clad in (the *lurica*)' and 'the holy man', there is also a clear suggestion of disguise in the covering, as the attacker withdraws believing he has speared Columba himself. It may thus be that a physical garment represented in a sacramental way the spiritual armour. Taking in the final part of the tale, the revelation of Lám Dess' death, Adomnán might additionally have had Isa 59.15-20 in mind as he wrote, with the bringing of the persecutors, foiled by a human / divine intervention, to justice by God's chosen instrument in the islands of the West, with Iona as the local expression of Zion, and the breath of God, the Holy Spirit, working through the dove of the church:

Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intervene; then his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital. So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. 'And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression', says the LORD. (Isaiah 59:15-20).

There is thus no compulsion to interpret the tale as representing a magic cloak. Adomnán may be seen to have maintained biblical orthodoxy in describing the physical manifestation of a conventional Christian motif. Indeed, the *congancness* might itself find an origin in this Biblical usage.

#### *D. Plummer's Presuppositions*

The question of the probability of the existence of these sagas in oral form in

---

<sup>122</sup> For whom see Reeves (1857)136.



Adomnán's time remains open. However, an interesting question is inspired by dipping into their recorded form. Both the Bible and VC record conscious rejections of sacrifice to demons / idols / other gods, and of magic, divination etc., all features of pagan religion.<sup>123</sup> Thus, the commonness of the inclusion of such topoi in the secular saga materials, written as scholars agree almost certainly by Christian monks, is strange. If they edited the tales so as to remove references to putative pagan Irish deities, as is commonly suggested, why did they allow these examples of the actual activities of pagan religion to remain? The record of such actions would have a greater immediacy for the adherents of pagan religion even than the mysterious existence of gods in the pantheon, and, one would assume, as actions bearing meaning as to the nature of the old religion, and thus rather more important for the bearers of the new, superseding religion, to suppress. Is there an explanation for this? Could we in fact be reading fair codifications of the sagas as they existed, unexpurgated by Christian scribes? Is the early existence of pagan Irish gods a product of an inappropriate eagerness on the part of scholars to transfer known religious systems outside of Ireland to the somewhat misty Irish period of pre-history? Could Carney's hypothesis, that the writers of the secular sagas have been more dependent on 12th century imagination shaped by seven centuries of Christian influence than on genuine ancient pre-Christian tradition, bear re-examination? The pursuit of answers to these questions, though relevant to the development of this dissertation as background, would take us beyond its central interest and competence, and must remain for others more qualified to explore.<sup>124</sup>

Substantial solid ground is agreed as being available in Adomnán's *Life of Columba*. Yet there seems to be more willingness in Plummer et seq. to accept the anonymous and, if Carney *et seq* are correct, fabricated testimony of the sagas on the nature of pre-Christian Irish religions. This testimony is allowed to control interpretation of the hagiographies, despite these having been written in many cases before the sagas were codified. Adomnán claims to be writing the facts as he knows them. Is the problem that his major evidence, the marvellous, is unacceptable?

123 e.g. VC ii.11 and Deut 12.29f etc.

124 See, for example, McCone(1989). He suggest *Cath Maige Tuired* could be understood as having three models: an ancient pagan tradition; a reaction to contemporary Viking attack; and a partial imitation of biblical models. He says, 'The greater the significance attaching to such contemporary factors in an extant text's compilation, the less faith one will have in the minimalist assumptions of nativists regarding the creative and manipulative impact of monastic *literati* upon the form and contents of those early medieval Irish sagas and their various recensions surviving in manuscript.' (137). McCone argues, following Carney, for an understanding of the sagas as composed deliberately and carefully for their contemporary milieu, under the by then formative influence of the Bible, and, he quotes Carney, 'their total literary experience' which includes a knowledge of Greek epic. p.139, citing Carney(1955)321.



Plummer, in common with all scholars, held presuppositions as he engaged in his research. Is it possible to identify what these were in relation to the question of the place of supernatural mirabilia in the lives of Irish saints? Amongst the numerous authorities cited in *VSH*, Plummer refers to the foremost church historian of his day, Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), and to his *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums*, (1902; English tr. 1905). There are sufficient references<sup>125</sup> to warrant an entry for the work in his list of abbreviations, and these show that Plummer engaged Harnack as an authority.<sup>126</sup> Harnack inherited from Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), the leading systematic theologian in Germany of the time, 'an approach which stressed the humane and ethical elements in Christianity at the expense of the metaphysical and supernatural,'<sup>127</sup> in the Kantian tradition. We may thus question whether Harnack's de-supernaturalising theology influenced the view Plummer is here espousing, i.e. that pagan religious influence on the saint's Lives is the source of their emphasis on the supernatural phenomena, rather than their own unpolluted tradition. Harnack followed Ritschl in regarding metaphysics and mythology as an alien Hellenistic intrusion into Christian thought. Did Plummer regard the miraculous attributes of the Irish Christian writings as also alien to Christian orthodoxy, though here derived from Irish pagan mythology?<sup>128</sup> We must return to examine his discredited attitude towards the early Irish Christian scribes. Plummer appears to have believed that the scribes were either unaware of their heathen 'substratum' as he terms it, or they 'toned down' the alien material in the secular tales by finding ecclesiastical parallels, or 'omitted its most characteristic features.'<sup>129</sup> They wrote both saga and vita, and incorporated stories from one to the other, with the main influence being pagan corruption of Christian ideas. As Gwynn suggests, it is possible to imagine a mediaeval antiquarian monastic scribe wishing to record the entertaining folk-tales of his day for their preservation in the developing medium of manuscript. Tolerance it may have been, but if so, it was tolerance from a position of security and strength. The more important question is that regarding the discernment employed by our hagiographers, and by Adomnán in particular. Was he so undiscerning in his tolerance as to simply incorporate the pagan substratum into his writing? And did the substratum actually contain the supernatural elements Plummer is so keen to explain as deriving therefrom? If the scribes excised the 'most characteristic features' as they

125 *VSH*, cxxx.3&4; cxxxiv.2; cxxxvi.4; clxvi.3; clxvii.6.

126 He follows and/or applies Harnack's views in each of the above references.

127 Quoted from Brown(1971)154.

128 In the same way as he had borrowed Harnack's view of Christianisation of Asia Minor noted above.

129 *VSH*, cxxxiii.

wrote the records from which we are constrained to characterise pagan mythology, how can this influence be traced at all?

We must examine further Plummer's underlying attitude, which is illustrated in part IV in two passages which must be quoted in full:

*Unfortunately too, the almost universal idea of these writers was that the best way of honouring their saintly patrons was to heap as many miracles as possible upon them. It is true that many of the lives, both Latin and Irish, conclude with a list of the superhuman virtues of the saint. But this moral tribute is purely perfunctory, and is very largely 'common form' (Delahaye pp.28-29). The real interest of the writer is in the thaumaturgy. Another unpleasant characteristic is the way in which spiritual blessings, including salvation itself, are made to depend on purely material conditions, on external circumstances and acts... both these characteristics come from the pagan amalgam in these lives which it is one of the main purposes of this introduction to trace. The saint is regarded as the more powerful druid, the forces underlying his religion are conceived as magical rather than spiritual and moral, and the objects and ceremonies associated with his creed and worship are only a very superior kind of "medicine"... Meanwhile it may be noted that the very points which give offence to the hagiologist in search of edification are often the things which most interest the student of mythology and primitive modes of thought.<sup>130</sup> (my emphasis).*

*And in the same way [as bells and bachalls] other objects and formularies connected with the new (Christian) religion came to be regarded as having not a spiritual and sacramental value, but a magical and material force.<sup>131</sup>*

In looking at the whole collection of saints' lives as he does, Plummer has good reason to reach these conclusions. The hagiographical corpus could be thus justly criticised. However, Plummer takes the approach of treating the corpus *in toto* regardless of individual variation in character, date, authorship etc. He treats the marvellous images contained in the vitae and folklore and Bible as a single set of phenomena without distinction of function, nature, or claimed source. They are all 'magic'. In looking, as we are, at the singular *Vita Columbae*, we have seen the weakness of this approach in general. In particular, though Adomnán could be said to 'heap' miracles upon his patron; his claims are frequently substantiated by testimony. The 'miracles' are carefully differentiated at various levels of organisation: the three books; types of prophesy; posthumous miracles etc. He does not conclude with a list of superhuman virtues. The 'points which give offence to the hagiologist in search of edification', the 'magic', fails to take account of the equivalent points presented in the

---

<sup>130</sup> VSH, xcii-xciii.

<sup>131</sup> VSH, clxxviii.

scriptural record. Here, for instance, objects are used to convey a spiritual blessing, 'miracles' are cited as evidence of the coming of the awaited Messiah, 'miracle' founds the faith, and 'miracles' accompany both the words of commission, and the acts of mission of those sent to proclaim the kingdom. In rejecting them all as 'magic', hence with a pagan origin, Plummer by inference rejects the scriptural record of the same images. He renders the authorised source of the new faith as itself subject to the same interpolation. The canon thus loses its authority as a standard by which practice may be measured. Two consequences flow out from this treatment: Firstly, the attitude of the 6th/7th century Ionan church towards the canonical authority of scripture is overlooked. For them, the appearance of a practice in the scripture would be adequate authority for both the emulation of the practice in ministry, and for the recording of such a practice in the literary record, perhaps regardless in the latter case of the question of actual occurrence.<sup>132</sup> If it was acceptable to the writers of the sacred word to record such as showing the activity of God through his saints (i.e. disciples) then it was acceptable, perhaps even required, for later writers to emulate. The major question here becomes that of the point at which the use of these objects, and indeed of the whole corpus of the marvellous, crosses over from the acceptable signs of the kingdom of God to the unacceptable counterfeiting of these signs by other means, i.e. where Christian miracle becomes magic. It is evident that our 7th century Irish Abbot had a rather different idea of where this line was crossed as compared to our 19th/20th century commentator. This introduces us to the second consequence of Plummer's attitude, 'another unpleasant characteristic is the way in which spiritual blessings, including salvation itself, are made to depend on purely material conditions, on external circumstances and acts...'. He might here be seen to articulate a bias against meritorious salvation, and against saintly miracles as part of this doctrine. True spiritual blessings, he infers, are not dependent on material manifestation. He dismisses these as polluting with mythological magic the original 'spiritual' faith in which the early Irish saints, whose reputation he seeks to defend, must have believed.<sup>133</sup>

---

132 Though it is accepted that these writers were not writing history in the modern sense, I think we must be careful in accepting too readily the idea that they did not care about the actual occurrence of these events in history. Adomnán shows himself to be so concerned, and to undergird his record of historical miracles by both the recording of witnesses, and of contemporary miracles which show their possibility. See cap 1.

133 We could conjecture here that Plummer's Anglicanism (made Deacon 1875; Chaplain of CCC), and his links with Ireland (he held Hon. D.Litt, Dublin(1923) & Celt. Nat. Univ. Irl.(1925), Hon MRJA(1925),) might have put him in a position to be defensive in the context of the recent re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy (1849), and the disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Ireland (1871). He might thus himself have been partly motivated by a desire to demonstrate the non-Roman-Catholic nature of the original church of Ireland, viz. one which did not accept salvation by works, including any sort of strange miracle. The Catholic Church of

If we were to posit the adherence to and practice of a biblically based supernaturalism in sixth/seventh century Ireland / Pictland, in accordance with Adomnán's record, an interesting possibility would present itself. With Carney, we could propose a late composition of the Irish sagas, incorporating elements of the secular Irish folk-tales, elements of the Christian supernatural, and elements of the Greek myths and sagas. Here we might find an explanation for the form in which the Irish sagas have been received, with their surprisingly Christian cosmology, and for the virtually non-existent documentary record for such material before ca. 1100. The proposal would thus be that though there may be an element of influence from oral saga and myth in the Christian writings, which grew with time, the strongest influence was actually from the Christian stories of the miracles of the saints to the secular tales as they became written. Thus reports of prophesy, nature miracle, vision, and healing in the sagas had as their inspiration the miraculous gifts of the Spirit of Christ, and the sub-Christian element in their nature as described in the sagas was the result of imaginative redaction with pagan Irish and Greek mythological influence. A counter to the last part of this hypothesis would be that documents preserving earlier manuscripts of the secular sagas were destroyed by the depredations of the Scandinavians. Two possible responses are firstly that, as Chadwick has said, it is possible that the Vikings were not as universally destructive as the monastic writers, who bore the brunt of their attentions, have tended to portray them,<sup>134</sup> and that thus we ought to expect to find at least fragmentary evidence of earlier manuscripts. Secondly, while saga manuscripts are in very short supply for the period 600-1100, Christian and other secular texts do exist. It seems strange that all evidence of the existence of early saga manuscripts is lost.

A second corollary of the position, if established, would not be acceptable to the theological school of Ritschl / Harnack, which I suggest was an influence upon Plummer. This would be that in the hagiographical record, there might after all remain evidence for the continuation in Christian history of marvellous manifestations. That the seventh century Ionan church should describe herself as in full possession of prophetic and apostolic supernatural accreditation, in full accordance with the biblical record, would, if demonstrable, be itself evidence for an alternative view of the miraculous in scripture than that proposed by Ritschl *et al.* This would be that the

---

course has not ever rejected its belief in miracles as some liberal Anglicans had by this stage. Plummer was no low-church Protestant however, as can be seen by his critical description of Hardy's *Wells* as written from a 'strongly Protestant point of view', and his deliberate selection of prayers for the deceased in his *Book of Devotions* (1916).

134 See Chadwick, *Celts*, 104.



seventh century church accepted the record of scripture as a standard by which to fashion its own practice. Around this she built her expectations of what was both possible in miraculous terms, of what it should expect to observe as Christians practiced their faith, and of what it selected to record as important in its own history. If this was shown to be the case here, it would potentially be interpreted as a continuation of 'alien' Greek supernaturalism introduced into Christian thought in the first century on into the supposedly isolated culture of seventh century Ireland. However, Ritschl's case as to the origin of the *mirabilia* in Christian thought remains open to question.<sup>135</sup> On the other hand, the biblical record is firm as a known authority for seventh century Irish Christian belief; the *mirabilia* would appear to them as evidently an important element in the spread of the faith in the first century. Establishing a biblical model for the record of *VC* would also form an alternative view to that propounded by Plummer and his followers for the main formative influence on the marvellous in the *vitae*. There would then be little need to posit a formative influence on the *VC* from the Irish sagas. Rather we could see the formative influence as the biblical record, with perhaps a secondary influence from sagas which may themselves have been influenced by the same biblical *mirabilia*, as well as retaining reflections of pagan Celtic religious belief and practice.

#### *E. Plummer and biblical influence*

At various stages in the collection of references, Plummer himself notes the possibility of biblical influence on Celtic hagiology.<sup>136</sup> Of the sixteen references, 10 refer to Old

<sup>135</sup> The field of pre-Christian miracle tradition remains a fruitful source of interest to researchers, see for instance Lynn Li Donnici, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions*, (Scholars Press 1995). See note 86)

<sup>136</sup> cxxxii n.4: Simon magus in *TBC*; Paul in *Ir.T.* III; pharaoh's dream in *Magh Lena*; Golden calf in *Keating* ii.346. cxxxiii n.4: druids bless not curse in *Tr.Th.* p416a; body flux healed...looks like 2Kings 4.29. cxxxix: sudden appearance within closed doors in *VTr* 52 may be due to biblical influence, Jn 20.19, but it has analogies in the secular literature. cxlvii n.6: walking on the water 'of course this is a case where biblical influence is possible'. cxlvii n.10: dividing water: 'here again biblical influences may be at work'. cxlix n.3: 'The demand of a druid for a human victim to still the raging of the sea... may be modelled on the Jonah story.' cl n.2: 'here the biblical parallel of Moses smiting the rock has clearly been at work'. clxvi: talking about the triumph of a more powerful sort of magic: 'it must be admitted that the biblical story of the contests of Moses with the magicians of Egypt gave colour to this point of view. Indeed many of the accounts of Patrick's conflicts with the druids have evidently been influenced by the narrative of Genesis'. clxvii n.2: Patrick (*VTr* 44, Ps.68) and Columba (*VC* ii37, Ps.45) both use chanted Psalms to discomfit enemies. clxviii n.6: on the punishment of criminals wandering round and round, numerous in *vitae*, 'I believe, however, that these stories owe their origin not to popular tradition, but to fanciful interpretation of a verse of scripture'; Ps.12. clxxi n.10: re. seeing the whole world spread out before the seer: 'Our Lord's temptation on the Mount has probably had influence here, Lk 4.5. clxxiv n.2: arm falls off as judgment: 'Dr Reeves suggests that Job 31.22 may have suggested the idea.' clxxviii n.5: saints' spittle cures disease: 'this shows biblical influence' clxxxiv n.2: violation of the sex taboo in 1Sam21.4-5, and in *vitae*. clxxxv n.13: manna/food tasting of what the eater desires: 'may have been derived from, or at



Testament and 6 to New Testament influences. That there are so very few such places of influences noted is itself a noteworthy feature of Plummer's collection, and we may wonder, given the commentaries above, if he was looking at all diligently for them. Very many rather obvious influences are overlooked. For instance the transportation of Philip from the Judean desert to Caesarea in Acts 8.39-40 is a more obvious biblical example of teleportation than that of Habakkuk (see footnote), and perhaps gives some justification in the Christian tradition for the strange story of the teleporting bachall in VC ii.14 (a reference Plummer misses in his section on this topos, clxxxvi). Again, on page clxxxv, hands being made skilful by the saint's touch must be prefigured by the examples in Ex 35.31 etc. of the holy Spirit gifting folk with skills of various kinds. Plummer says of the latter: 'I cannot produce any secular analogue' (note 14) which may well be true, but the biblical analogue *is* clear. Perhaps Plummer explains his apparent omission when he says of healing body flux: 'pure biblical miracles: in our lives they are not so common.' He is only looking for biblical miracles transferred wholesale into an Irish context (c.f. VC ii.1). Plummer is not alone in his conclusion. The more recent student of Irish miracles Stancliffe acknowledges the folkloric as the third source of the miracle stories in Irish hagiography after the biblical and apocryphal.<sup>137</sup> She draws a parallel between the druids' magical ability to raise a wind, and that of Patrick and Columba (VC ii.34) (92&n.30, 31). Plummer was criticised for imputing to Irish folklore features that were common to the Indo-European genre. Stancliffe falls into the same trap. Similarity in appearance does not of itself indicate dependence without correlative evidence. The motif of storms opposing the servants of God has a wide occurrence in the Judaeo-Christian tradition,<sup>138</sup> as well as in non-Irish folklore. She notes one example from Plummer: 'that the Irish saints took over from the druids their fearsome curses,' (VSH clxxiii-iv), but notes in caveat documented Irish care to cite biblical and patristic authority for the practice, as we have seen. This casual observation demonstrates clearly that for these Irish writers of the *Hibernensis*, a key document in Irish church polity, this aspect of the marvellous had scripture and the Fathers as authority and foundation, not pagan myth, though these last may also rely on scriptural motifs for the 'druidic' characteristics. In summary, we can say with growing confidence that the accounts of the marvellous in the secular sagas look like those in the vitae. The answer to the question of chronological priority, and of

---

least been influenced by, Jewish-Christian sources...' c.f. Wisdom xvi.20-1. clxxxvi n.6: saints or others or objects transported from place to place in an incredibly short time; 'The biblical parallel of the transport of Habakkuk (from the apocryphal Bel and the Dragon) is sometimes cited.'

137 Stancliffe (1992)92

138 e.g. Job 27.21; Isa 41.16; Jer 18.17; Ps 48.7; Jonah 1.4; most importantly Mk 4.37-41; storms hindering St Germanus on his mission to England (V.Germ. xii) etc.

probable source thus finds a more secure evidential foundation in the Christian tradition.

In conclusion, we have seen that it may not be viable to interpret the marvellous phenomena associated with Columba as borrowings or unconscious references to secular saga material, nor as the literary appropriation by Christian authors of pagan magic, on grounds of the unreliability of the source materials, the uncertainty of the congruence between saga descriptions of pagan marvellous and their historical reality, and the congruence, at first sight, with accounts in the Christian tradition of similar manifestations. It is tantalising to imagine that in Adomnán we have one of the last descriptions of an active Christian tradition of marvellous phenomenological activity captured 'in print' as it were just prior to the onset of the practice of writing pre-Christian Irish history. This practice might subsequently itself come to influence the writing of Christian histories of saints in a synergistic amplification of thaumaturgical hyperbole. Pursuing the reliability of this theory of the influence of the Christian tradition upon Adomnán's description of the marvellous will engage us for the remainder of this dissertation. Described against the biblical account of the marvellous, the standing of these phenomena as recorded by Adomnán in this tradition is increasingly clear. For Adomnán, Columba is a prophet in the biblical tradition, and not a clairvoyant..

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Flowering of the Kingdom of God in the Isles of the Ocean.**

(Eschatological Nature and Function)

#### *A. Introducing the servant of the Divine Gardener.*

The fundamental purpose of establishing the sanctity of a saint is established as the primary reason that the hagiographers performed their task. The political and didactic purposes of the author, over which there remains an element of debate, depended on the foundation of establishing his saint's position as an earthly representative of God, and as one who spoke God's voice into the contemporary and subsequent historical situation. Without the authority established through the proof of sanctity, political and didactic purposes would have no weight. Thus it was essential, for an effective hagiography, to demonstrate the saint's (and thus his successor's) virtue, in both its senses of ethical righteousness and spiritual power. The task for us here is to go beneath the surface level of understanding the function of this life as proof of sanctity – however this is then employed – to seek elucidation of the question of what it was that the writer believed he was using to demonstrate this authority; what categories did his theological understanding hold which he employed to the task; what did he believe to be the nature of the phenomena he records. We are not so much here searching for literary sources for Adomnán, as seeking to trace the conceptual and theological background to the way in which he presents the marvellous in this life. We are seeking to determine if he is simply 'following the trend', as it were, in hagiographic fashion, in which case his examples and descriptions will find their source only in these predecessors. The thesis being pursued is that Adomnán was operating out of a much older tradition than the hagiographic, a tradition which goes back to the earliest days of Christian history.

Following a conventional apologium, Adomnán opens his work with a warning for his readers to concentrate on the substance of the work rather than on its lexicography. Reeves (followed by Fowler and Sharpe) noted that this passage was 'a paraphrase of 1Cor 4.20, suggested by the passage in Sulpicius Severus' Preface to his *Life of St. Martin*.'<sup>1</sup> The three passages are:

---

1 Reeves(1857) 3 note a; Fowler (1894)1 note 1.; Sharpe(1995)note 1. Sharpe does not acknowledge earlier notes. Sharpe sees the process as a borrowing direct from the *VSM*, 'Adomnán's primary literary model', the model having itself depended on Paul.

Vulgate:  
'Non enim in  
sermone est  
regnum dei,  
sed in virtute.'

2

VSM:  
'quia  
regnum Dei  
non in eloquentia,  
sed in fide constat.  
Meminerint ...'

3

VC:  
'Memerintque  
regnum dei  
non in eloquentiae exuberantia  
sed in fidei florulentia constare.'

4

While the distinction is conventional in Christian writing, Adomnán embellishes the phrase uniquely. '...the kingdom of God consisteth not in the richness of eloquence, but in the blossoming of faith (B) / standeth not in abundance of speech, but in excellency of faith (F) / inheres not in exuberance of rhetoric, but in the blossoming of faith (AA) / stands not on the flow of eloquence but in the flowering of faith (S)' Though Adomnán has borrowed the paraphrase from Sulpicius Severus, it is not a slavish copy. He has indicated the function for which he employs the phrase, and his understanding of the meaning of it, by his own additions in what we might correctly call flowery language. We should particularly notice both Athanasius' and Patrick's employment of the same idea. Antony argues that God's deposit in them is the power of faith not worldly wisdom, '... non in sapientia mundi habemus repositum, sed in virtute fidei',<sup>5</sup> or the emptiness of eloquence (*eloquentiae vanus*, 0161D). It is faith which results in the marvels they see. He taunts the Greek sophists that their 'beautiful language' does not impede the Christian mission, whereas the power supplied by God through faith in the cross weakens magic and sorcery. In *Conf.* i.11, Patrick says:

How much more ought we to seek, we who are, he affirms, 'The letter of Christ for salvation as far as the ends of the earth', and if not fluent, yet established and very vigorous, 'written in your hearts, not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God'<sup>6</sup>

(c.f. 2 Cor 3.3, and Cassian *Coll* 1.20). Patrick defends himself by insisting that the message of salvation has not been spread by learned eloquence, but by the strength of the Spirit demonstrated in the vigorous mission of establishing the faith in Ireland. He goes on to describe this mission in part III. It was a mission guided by prophetic vision, and accredited by signs and wonders.<sup>7</sup> Patrick's thesis will be seen to have major relevance in Adomnán's presentation of the ministry of Columba. Jerome comments on Paul's passage (vv.19&20):

I shall not regard the *pomp of eloquence*, but the *results of conduct*, where the *power of faith* is an issue<sup>8</sup>

2 Vulg. 1 Cor 4.20.

3 VSM, first preface.

4 VC 1a.

5 Evagrius *Vita Antonii*, PL 73 160D: XLIX

6 'quanto magis nos adpetere debemus qui sumus inquit 'Epistola Christi in salutem usque ad ultimum terrae' Et si non diserta sed rata et fortissima 'scripta in cordibus uestris non atramento sed Spiritu Dei uiui'. (Howlett(1994) XIL37-41).

7 Howlett 111f. for visionary refs; & *Conf.* III. XX. 121(45.2) for his ref. to Signs and wonders.

8 Et cognoscam non sermonem eorum, qui inflati sunt, sed virtutem. Examinabo non eloquentiae



These sources demonstrate various sources of Adomnán's opening phrase, and method in the VC. He does not derive his additional vocabulary from Jerome, but Jerome may have suggested Adomnán's imaginative adjectival couplet in his *eloquentiae pompam* and *conversationis effectum*. It must be unlikely that Adomnán would have borrowed this phrase from the *VSM* if it had not fitted his purpose in writing the life, so it may be that he has in mind a particular source of exuberant rhetoric which he seeks to counter. Could it be the claims of Armagh; of the Ionan conservatives; of the Pictish rulers; of Northumbria? Political possibilities here have already been discussed above. Or is it a more spiritual, theologically loaded observation, arguing that there is more to the faith than intellectual understanding? The question we wish to answer in this section is what are the contents of Adomnán's concepts of the *regnum dei* (kingdom of God), and of the *fidei florulentia* (blossoming of faith) in which this kingdom is inherent, or on which it stands?

#### 1. The Kingdom of God in the Life of Columba.

Adomnán quite deliberately demonstrates throughout VC that actions, and in particular supernaturally powerful, marvellous actions, are the true proofs of faith. He records very little indeed of Columba's preaching, or other eloquence, recording only the fruitful words of his prophetic revelations, and small selections of significant conversations. In his opening statement, the participle of *consto* renders the sense of something which is established, manifest, or evident; especially, with in, of something which consists in, is composed of, or rests in something else in order to become what it is.<sup>9</sup> Thus we can safely assume he is referring to the manifest establishment of this Kingdom by virtue (i.e. through the power or agency of) the flowering of faith. The Kingdom is of course a central eschatological concept in the evangelists' accounts of the Life of Christ, and throughout the NT.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, the *Altus Prosator* carries a

---

*pompam*, sed *conversationis effectum*, ubi *virtus fidei* esse probatur. (Auctor incertus, Hieronymus Stridonensis?, *Comm. I Cor.* IV.19, PL 30 0729BC.

9 L&S 439.

10 From B. Klappert, *NIDNTT* 2.372-389. In the Old Testament, the kingdom primarily comes to be associated with the rule of God as expressed through the immanent rulers of his people, and refers to the power of God manifested in this way. 'In later texts, Yahweh's kingship is interpreted in an eschatological sense' (2.376) looking forward to Yahweh's rule over the whole earth at the end of time. In Rabbinic Judaism, the Kingdom is a purely eschatological concept (2.377), and in LXX apocrypha, it is identified with the four cardinal ethical virtues (4Macc2.23, and Wis 6.20: 'The desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom'), a shift of meaning completed in Philo. Jesus is not recorded as claiming kingship, but named as king by others 'we may suppose that the basis of the charge is to be seen and found largely in the way Jesus behaved.' [2.379] 'We should note that Jesus himself saw his miracles of healing, his casting out of demons, and his preaching of the gospel to the poor as the fulfilment of Isaianic prophecies (cf Isa 29.18f; 35.5f; 61.1f) 'The Kingdom of God is a term of central importance only in the Synoptic tradition; It will come: it is coming; is guaranteed by Jesus' actions as the leaves of the fig tree show the nearness of summer (Mt 24.32f; Mk 13.28f; Lk 21.29f), and will break in suddenly. It is present (as shown by expulsion of demons, Mtt 12.28, Lk 11.20 shows Satan has been bound by one stronger than he, Mtt 12.29; Mk 3.27; Lk 11.21) 'In the works of Jesus the kingdom of God is



vivid picture of the flowery midst of paradise where the tree of life bears leaves for the healing of the nations (Rev 22.2).<sup>11</sup>

*a. Kingdom in the monastery*

The realisation of the kingdom in the environment of the Christian community, and the monastery, in its rituals, liturgies and rules of life, resulting in renewed inter-human, human-creation and human-deity relationships is an element of monastic thought. Gregory of Tours' episcopal city provided a 'model for the kingdom of the people of God'.<sup>12</sup> For him, the Christian hold over Gaul remained fragile, and the civic realisation of the kingdom acted as bulwark against persistent paganism; could this too be detected in Adomnán's writing, and therefore be part of the reason for writing as he does? Eucherius sees the ascetic community of Lérins as a retreat from the fallen world, 'a placid harbour far removed from the breakers'.<sup>13</sup> The desert retreat moreover was the place where God's light was manifested, and the grace of the heavenly kingdom poured out in miracle, as seen in the lives of Moses, Elijah, David, and pre-eminently of Christ. Eucherius notices from Mtt 3&4 that it was in the desert where Christ first mentions the kingdom of heaven (*in deserto primum mentio regni coelestis infertur*) (21), where the angels ministered to him (21, 23), where he was first seen to receive the Spirit (21-2), where food was multiplied (24), and where the transfiguration occurred (25). Each of these topoi are important in Adomnán's presentation of Columba, as we will see.<sup>14</sup> This may represent at least a partial recovery of lost paradise. The 'Kingdom' 'realised' there to some extent. The Life of Hilary, successor to Eucherius' abbot Honoratus, describes Lérins as an 'earthly paradise'.<sup>15</sup> Cassian shows us that the kingdom of God, by which he means eternal life, is the aim of the holy life, of purity of heart (*Coll.* 1, see esp. 1.13). For Cassian, the kingdom is established where the pure heart is established. In Conference 10, Cassian brings together the concepts of union with God, spiritual vision (see cap.4), purity and the eschatological kingdom. He sets his description on the high mountain of

---

already a present reality.' (2.382). I am interested to trace any similar eschatological function in Adomnán's view of the marvellous.

11 C&M 49. They link this stanza to the concept of the kingdom of God (62). It should be noted that in most place where C&M refer to 'the kingdom', they are referring not to an earthly, pre-parusia manifested kingdom, but to the heavenly kingdom wherein the blessed dead reside with God. Their focus is thus, in a sense, upward. I am here investigating whether Adomnán demonstrates familiarity with a 'horizontally' manifest kingdom, anticipating the eschatological heavenly kingdom where all is new. (Though see chap 4 below for a different nuance in their understanding).

12 Hillgarth(1992)214.

13 Eucherii Lugdunensis, *De Contemptu Mundi*, PL50, col 726

14 Eucherii Lugdunensis, *De Eremitis*, PL50 passim. See esp. §21-26 0706B-0707A for Christ's eremitic sojourn.

15 VS Hilarii Arelatensis cap 5§7 ed. S.Carallin, *Vitae Sanctorum Honorati et Hilarii Episcoporum Arelatensium* (Lund 1952)86.

solitude, removed from the turbulence of sin, as in the mount of transfiguration. The mount forms a possible type of Iona, though Columba was not removed from others' sin, he did withdraw there and to other islands to pray, as Cassian recommends.

While we still hang around in this body we must reproduce some image of that blessedly eternal life promised for the future to the saints so that among us it may be a case of 'God-all in all' (1Cor. 15.28). (*Coll* 10.6)

All a monk's striving must be for union with God,

that he may deserve to possess in this life an image of future happiness and may have the beginnings of a foretaste in this body of that life and glory of heaven. (*Coll* 10.7, *Luibheid* pp.128-30).

Cassian holds the kingdom as a future reality, contemplation of which can bring joy in the discipline of maintaining purity in preparation for its promised blessings. As we shall see, Adomnán goes beyond this internal, invisible definition.

*b. Kingdom in the world beyond the vallum.*

However, the concept we are here investigating goes far beyond the vallum, as well as effecting much within. The concept looks forward to a new age when the kingdom will have been completely established in a new heaven and earth, and all destructive elements of the present age are done away with (see e.g. Cassian *Conf* 1.13). God's perfect writ will run freely, and will result in a perfect existence without hunger, thirst, disease, without sin of any kind, without conflict, broken relationships either between humans, between them and the rest of creation, or between the creation and the creator. In short, it is the concept of a future when all will be in peaceful, harmonious co-existence, creation and creator in a state of 'rest' together under the rule of Christ the King. This 'eschaton' is thus the concept of a 'real' future state whose fulfilment is awaited as prophesied in the OT, and inaugurated in the NT. Adomnán's belief in such an awaited heaven is demonstrated incontrovertibly in his writing, and in his era, as O'Reilly(1997) shows. He has a definite concept of the new earth, describing Columba as a leader of innumerable souls to the heavenly *country* (*ad caelestem patriam*, iii1), i.e. the fully consummated kingdom of heaven of the eschaton.

A number of early poems associated with Iona takes us closer to the time of the 'historical' Columba. *Amra Choluimb Chille*.<sup>16</sup> viii5-6 is interpreted as recording Columba's evangelistic success in turning the tribes of the Tay, 'to the will of the King'.<sup>17</sup> The context strongly suggests this to be the heavenly King, and thus records the establishment of God's kingdom, the place where God's will rules, on earth.

<sup>16</sup> For the most recent discussion, see C&M 96f, and their conclusion (122).

<sup>17</sup> C&M 119.

Similarly, the seventh century Irish poet Beccán has references to 'To heaven's king he [Columba] was known...the king who ends evil...the king of fire', and 'On the loud sea he cried to the king who rules thousands who rules... kings and countries', each of which must refer to God.<sup>18</sup> Biblical theologians of the second half of the twentieth century have rediscovered this theological topos as an important substrate in the thought of the biblical writers. The gospels present Christ as coming to establish the kingdom of God, or for Matthew, the kingdom of Heaven,<sup>19</sup> on the earth in the present age. The disciples of Jesus were sent out by Him to further the establishment of this kingdom, an establishment which will, in this age, only ever be partial, but will nevertheless manifest the conditions of the coming eschaton. This is an eschaton in process of being realised. C.H.Dodd sees this as an already established ethical kingdom which proceeds inexorably to a summit of ultimate evolutionary achievement. Plummer, as we have seen, writing under Harnack's influence, after explaining the miraculous as folk-tale, was interested primarily in the ethical dimension of the portrait of the saints presented in the lives. Adomnán goes further. He does mention Columba's pure heart on many occasions, but the ethical content of this pure heart is never significantly developed; where it is, the accompanying proof is not ethical activity on the natural level, but the miraculous phenomena which gives flesh to the ethical intent. Neither is it Columba's human wisdom which is the focus. What interests Adomnán is rather the direct contact this man has with the source of wisdom; the source of ethical rectitude; the source of power to incarnate that eschatological ethical wisdom. In other words it is the in-breaking of the rule of God, making so, by direct action, as it were, the conditions of the eschatological kingdom into the pre-fulfilment age. This feature, if present in Adomnán's thought, coincides with the realised eschatological view in the NT identified by Ladd(1974 & 1975), and developed by Turner(1996).

## 2. The flowering of faith.

Adomnán uses a related term to *florulentia* in the angel's annunciation to Columba's mother in iii 1: '...you will bear...(filium floridum) a son of such flower (S) that he, as though one of the prophets of God, shall be counted in their number...'. Biblical references to flowers/ flowering / blossom / blossoming are few, and in the main refer to an ephemeral object representing temporariness, something which though beautiful, fades quickly. This is evidently not Adomnán's allusive intent, as for him, the flowering of faith represents the coming of the kingdom of God. It would be

18 *Fo Réir Choluimb* 9, 24-5, and *Tiugraind Beccán*, 8, C&M 129-31. They argue for a seventh century date for Beccán's poems.

19 cf. Altus Prosator, 'Caeli de regni' C&M 44.

impossible to imagine this to be, in Adomnán's theology, a temporary, fading phenomenon. Thus he is using the image in a way which is practically the opposite of the general biblical usage. The adjective *florulentia* is very rare in this ending.<sup>20</sup> Cassian describes abbot Moses as among the most beautiful of the 'flowers of holiness' (*Conf.* 1.1). It provides a metaphor whose meaning can be illustrated from the Greek root: '*ek-flainw*, to stream forth'; 'putting forth; the visible manifestation of the purpose of a living system'. L&S give 'abounding in flowers' as a post-classical rendering,<sup>21</sup> Souter suggests 'having flowers' or 'flourishing'. The flower is the crowning visible achievement of a flowering plant's existence. It is the visible manifestation of its nature as a flowering plant, without which this nature would not be demonstrated. The type, shape, colour etc. of the flower also identifies the plant which produces it as one of a huge number of varieties of flowering plant. There are two places in the prophecy of Isaiah which may provide the background to Adomnán's descriptive metaphor here.

In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit. (Isaiah 27:6).<sup>22</sup>

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. (Isaiah 35:1-2).

In Adomnán's Christian world-view, it is the new Israel, the kingdom of God established by Christ, which blossoms where once there was wilderness. We see in these passages that the flower has a further function as the organ leading to (non-vegetative) reproduction, vital to the establishment and propagation of the species

20 Diarmuid Ó Laoghaire cites a usage of a similar image, a 'fertile field with many flowers', referring to the church, from an unpublished section of the later (late ninth/early tenth century) *Catechesis Celtica* (CC 42rb, Ní Chatháin & Richter (1987) 148). The application is to the church as a field of flowers of martyrdom, red flowers of their blood; white of incorruptibility; 'viola' of humility. Although Adomnán is concerned to present Columba as incorrupt and holy, 'his pure heart' is a commonplace, he has no interest in the VC of presenting the flowering of faith as martyrdom as such. He sees ascetic holiness demonstrated in marvellous acts which bring the kingdom of God. The flowers on his robe are also of every colour (iii1), an entirely more comprehensive floral banner than the martyrological tricolour.

21 L&S 761

22 '*Qui ingrediuntur impetu ad Jacob, florebit et germinabit Israel, et implebunt faciem orbis semine.*' This suggested source for the metaphor of the kingdom, taken with the tale of the visioned robe (see below on iii1) brings with it a geo-political connotation: could this be taken as background to a suggestion that Adomnán is subtly presenting the spread of the power of one or other of the nations of his day? It seems highly unlikely in the literary context that Adomnán could have such a purpose in mind. The most obvious group to whom this could feasibly apply is the Dal Riadan dynasty. Herbert has argued for the support of Adomnán for the Northern Uí Néill. (see my summary above). His attention to various of the contemporary dynasties, declining to openly favour any of them, combined with his direct, open, and heavily substantiated account of the spread of the spiritual Kingdom of God in this book incline one to take Adomnán's interpretation of Isaiah, if it exists, at the eschatological and not contemporary geo-political level. The question would bear closer scrutiny in another study.



through the production of fruit. By this extension of the content of Adomnán's metaphor to include fruit, it may be possible to further understand how it is that he works out the ramifications of his statement in the rest of the VC. 'By their fruit you will recognise them.' (Matthew 7:16). 'Fruit bearing' is not the result of human action, but of the working of the power of the Spirit (Mt 3.8 & //). Eschatologically, every tree without fruit will be condemned (Mtt 3.10; 7.19; Lk 13.6). Close, obedient fellowship with Jesus is seen as the secret of the power to bear fruit (Jn 15.2ff). The fruit counts and abides for eternal life (Jn 4.36; 15.16). Paul recognises walking in the light, characterised as the fruit of the Spirit in goodness, righteousness and truth (Eph 5.8-9) is required in order to inherit the kingdom of God. This is fruit which, again, appears as a result not of unaided human effort, but of the activity of the indwelling Spirit on the will. Paul also uses the term to refer to the results of his own missionary work (Rom 1.13; Phil 1.22). The fruit of the Fig tree is included in Messianic prophecies (Mic 4.4; Zech 3.10); and in reference to the coming of the kingdom, when coming into leaf anticipates the coming summer, and subsequent fruit (Mtt 24.32f & //). Finally Rev. 22.2 records that all hindrances to the production of fruit are removed, and we see the tree of life constantly producing fruit in the eschaton.<sup>23</sup> In the Old Testament, the prophets looked forward to the establishment of the new heaven and earth. One passage particularly redolent of Adomnán's thought concerning Columba's repute and status as he presents him is Isaiah 11.1-9:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, ... And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, ... with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins ... The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

The continuation of Isaiah 35.5-6 records an eschatological vision of the blooming of the desert:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

Book two contains numerous marvels of a similar nature to these: the gushing forth of

<sup>23</sup> Following Hensel, *NIDNTT* 722-3) and Motyer (ibid p.724-5). The eschaton here is the concept of a 'real' future state whose fulfilment is awaited as prophesied in the OT, and contained in the New. Adomnán's belief in such an awaited heaven is demonstrated incontrovertibly in his writing, and in his era, as O'Reilly (1997) shows, 80-106.



water has a direct parallel in ii 10, and healing miracles, albeit different in detail, constitute signs of the coming kingdom, produced by Columba's blessings. So, the etymology of Adomnán's embellished borrowed phrases here appear to denote that in his Abbatial opinion, the Kingdom of God is established in what we might term manifest ontological reality when, and only when, faith is exercised in such a way that tangible evidence of its exercise are manifestly observable in ways beyond the unaided ability of human resources. We might expect this evidence to demonstrate the glory of the system<sup>24</sup> from which it derives; the nature of this system; the identity of the system; and a reproductive function. And we might assume that as Adomnán addresses a contemporary audience in terms of their expectation of the content of the Kingdom in their experience, that he himself expects such evidence to be available in his own time. However, Adomnán does not answer at this point what he would accept as evidence for such flowering; instead he appeals to his readers to concentrate on the deeds profitable to this flowering, deeds which were dependent on God for their achievement: ('Let them not despise the publication of deeds that are profitable and that have not been accomplished without the help (*opitulationes*) of God').<sup>25</sup> In recording this, we have a clear indication of his view of the phenomena he is about to describe: they were not the product of human activity or human words, but are dependent on the assistance, the intervention, of divine agency, as Antony had insisted.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11).

The identification of the saint with Divine intervention on his/her request is nothing new to our understanding of the hagiographer's method. However, we are interested in the content of Adomnán's concept of the nature of this intervention. The rest of his work forms an exposition of the evidence he would consider to constitute a manifestation, a flowering, of the faith which elicits the manifestation from God. Before exploring Adomnán's argument, his presentation of Columba's marvellously accredited life, I want to make a brief sketch of the eschatological view of his milieu.

---

24 By which I am referring to the plant which gives rise to the flower as the (living) system which produces the flower; in this application, the kingdom of God.

25 *opitulationes* : 1Cor 12.28 *Vulgate* is another example of its use; here Paul is listing the various *pneumatikoi* i.e. gifts and ministries empowered by the Spirit: '...gratias curationum, opitulationes, gubernationes, genera linguarum...' (gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues).

*B Eschatology in the milieu of seventh century Ireland*

Patrick (*Conf.* §14, 17) shows himself to have held a clear view of the approach of the end of the world, realising the call to preach the kingdom to the ends of the earth, and the Joeline promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, the citing Mtt 24.14, Mk 16.15-16, and Acts 2.17-18. The last seven stanzas of the *Altus Prosator* present a very keen awareness of the biblical description of the day of the Lord (C&M 55-53). Columbanus believed the world to be in its last days; e.g. 'The world is already in its latter days' (Letter V, 4.23-4, Walker p.41). As we have noticed, Adomnán adapts a phrase of Sulpicius, and thereby, the context confirms, adopts his eschatology. Important to our study here, Hillgarth (1987, 325) notes a study of the function of Gregory the Great's recording miracles, visions and signs being, 'to show how the future age had broken into Italy'. He sees as one of two principle legacies of the seventh century the perception 'less often noted today but perhaps the greatest novelty of the age... of the constant interpenetration of this world and the next' (1992, 230-1). From his presentation of the journeys of souls of the departed (iii6, 7, 9-14), Adomnán, it seems, shares what Hillgarth<sup>26</sup> describes as Gregory's central conviction, 'that an immortal soul is the only essential thing a man possesses and that the whole of life has to be lived in the light of the approaching Judgement', and also, 'There seems no doubt that one of the main aims of the *Dialogues*, as a whole, is to make men see heaven as their true home (*patria caelestis*); this is stressed from the preface onwards.' Whether Hillgarth's next sentence also applies to Adomnán forms part of the question this dissertation seeks to answer: 'The miracles are intended to demonstrate the transient, transparent nature of the visible world and so to instil a longing for the future life' (220). He notes the shared nature of this world view in Late Antique thought,

The Christian thinkers whom we see as living in Late Antiquity hardly thought of themselves as doing so. For them man's history was divided into ages and they were in the sixth age, that had begun with the birth of Christ and would see the conversion of all peoples to belief in Him. Theirs was a theology that envisaged history as progressing, with remarkable speed, towards a definite goal. The conversion of the world would shortly be followed by its end (221).

This was a view developing across the old empire, largely through the influence of the Bible and the works of Gregory the Great in the growing and influential monastic movement: 'a new transcendent view of the world was already emerging in the seventh century'. (228) 'A new hierarchy of values was at war with an older system, based on pagan values... The true *patria* was now no longer Rome... it was situated in the heavens.' (230)

---

<sup>26</sup> Hillgarth recapitulates R.A. Markus (1985) 92f., and his own (1987) 324f.

Isidore addresses the subject directly if briefly: 'How should the kingdom of God be understood? Answer: five ways: that is, Christ, faith, the gospel, the church present, indeed the kingdom of heaven itself' and he refers to John the Baptist's proclamation of its advent in Mtt 3.2.<sup>27</sup> Bede was certain the end would come soon; Christ had been preached even in Britain,<sup>28</sup> and Columba worked 'in a remote corner of the world'.<sup>29</sup> Although Adomnán shows no interest in the advent of antichrist shown by Gregory in his *Moralia* and letters,<sup>30</sup> he does share in the conviction of the approaching end, though perhaps without Gregory's urgency. Herbert notes the link of this process of conversion<sup>31</sup> with miraculous demonstrations of the gospel: 'From his hagiographical reading, Adomnán no doubt was familiar with the convention that miraculous signs assisted the process of conversion of a heathen people,' noting the final sentence of VCii34 'Let the reader reflect how great and of what nature was the venerable man, in whom almighty God made manifest to the heathen people the glory of his name through those signs of miraculous power described above.'<sup>32</sup> This view was not unique; Jonas reports the missionary vision of Columbanus as an image of the round world with great spaces still left for him to work in.<sup>33</sup> Thomas O'Loughlin's work on the seventh century Irish mental map of the world,<sup>34</sup> with Ireland / Scotland on the furthest edge, 'the ends of the earth' lends weight to the probability that Adomnán, if not Columba himself, saw their mission to the Picts as the final vital enactment of the Mtt.28 missionary commission.<sup>35</sup> We should also note from the immediate milieu the *Amra*'s references to Christ as 'the King's son' (VII.23), and to Columba turning the tribes of the Tay to 'the will of [God] the King' (VIII.6). These show the currency of the idea of God as King, inferring the existence of his kingdom.

27 ...regnum Dei quibus modis intelligitur? Respondit: Quinque: id est, Christus, fides, Evangelium, Ecclesia praesens, vel ipsum regnum coelorum ... Poenitentiam agite; appropinquavit enim regnum coelorum.' Isidorus Hispalensis: *De Veteri et Novo Testamento Quaestiones*. Quaestio XXXIII PL83 0205B.

28 Hillgarth(1992)221fn48: Bede, *In Lucam*, IV; ed. D.Hurst, CC 120, p.278' *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, II, II; PL93, col.162; 222 refs, see Hillgarth fn 49.

29 Bede *HE* V.15.

30 Hillgarth(1992)222.

31 We note RA Markus' caution on the conceptual consideration of conversion, 'The awareness of the conceptual problems involved to be found in Wallace-Hadrill's chapter 'From Paganism to Christianity' is, alas, rarely to be found in the work of historians.' (1992, 158, n.6), and see McCone's discussion (1990, 21f.).

32 Herbert (1988)140.

33 *VCol* i.27, though Wood(1982, 75) suggests Columbanus' interest in missionary work may have been exaggerated by his biographer.

34 O'Loughlin(1997)11-23.

35 Just one example from the end of the eighth century in Ireland suffices to show the process viewed nearing completion: The *Félire Óengusso* (ed. W.Stokes, 1905) records: 'Paganism (*in gentlecht*) has been ruined, although it was illustrious and widespread. The kingdom of God the Father has filled heaven, earth and sea' (*Prol.*, 215-6).

Both Gilbert Markus and Jennifer O'Reilly (1997) have recently introduced a consideration of the eschatological element in Adomnán's thought.<sup>36</sup> In her exploration of Adomnán's use of the monastic tradition of *lectio divina* O'Reilly identifies various eschatological elements: The story of Oswald's envisioned victory is an image of the continuing fulfilment of Joshuaic prophesy i1(85). The fragrance and savour of paradisaic flower and fruit of heaven is foretasted in the monastery from i37 (90), ii44 (92) and iii23(96), and the monastic life prefigures the heavenly sanctuary ii44(93). The image of the eschatological Jerusalem is foreseen in Columba's blessing of Iona; the sacramental foretaste of eternal life may be discerned in the bread of angels taken at mass before his death, and Adomnán's exposition of the patristic octave as related to salvation history and Columba's entry into eternal rest on the eighth day iii23(96-end). O'Reilly identifies linkage between various patristic and other early Christian sources and the ideas she traces here, showing Adomnán to be presenting a sophisticated contemporary theological presentation of Columba's life, rather than the simplistic collection of a series of hagiographic commonplace narratives simply demonstrating sanctity. There are many more indications of the eschatological in the VC. O'Reilly does not link this eschatological awareness with Adomnán's mentioning of the Kingdom of God, a concept I believe may be shown to act as a unifying key to the interpretation of Adomnán's presentation of Columba's life, and particularly for the purpose of this thesis, of his use of the marvellous. O'Reilly has demonstrated that Adomnán clearly had a keen awareness of the eschaton in his thought; I hope to demonstrate that Adomnán distinctly understood the realisation of the eschaton, in part, in his day.

Thus by 'kingdom', we see Adomnán may be referring to a 'real' rule of God which is conceived as being fulfilled in the eschaton, and made partially, but concretely present in the age before, through miracle. I am thus assuming a presupposition of Adomnán that the miraculous is not by definition impossible. I am probing to investigate whether Adomnán, like the evangelists, holds a concept of miracle as an eschatological realisation, understood as an inbreaking of the future state, thus whether this might form a category which helps to interpret at least some of the phenomena which we will be considering. I recognise that there is much to debate in

---

36 O'Reilly (1997) op. cit. and Markus and O'Reilly, papers at the conference *Spes Scotorum*, Edinburgh, 7th June 1997 (publication awaited). O'Reilly interpreted some of the images contained in the Book of Kells as having an eschatological element, and Markus noted the particular character of the zoological miracles taking place on Iona, where incidents show an unnatural harmony between Columba and animals (horse iii23, snakes ii28 // iii23, knife blunted ii29. Markus thought the two blessings here create a sort of paradise, a centre of harmony, a glimpse of heaven on Iona. There may here be a reference to Isaiah's prophecy, and to the monastery as a foretaste of heaven, but it was only to be so while the monks maintain God's commandments. Here is thus an unmistakable eschatological reference.



each of these presuppositions, but wish to proceed with Ladd's 'already but not yet' framework in an attempt to make sense of the purpose of Adomnán in including the stories we will look at in the *Life*. I now need to try to give some representative examples of the tales to illustrate my contention, and will attempt to select tales which illustrate the major aspects of Adomnán's concept of kingdom of God as expressed in VC.

### *C. The coming Kingdom in the Life of Columba*

There are various conventional borrowings from the Bible / duplications of biblical miracles: water into wine (ii1), resuscitation (ii32), healing by touching the hem of his robe (i3), calming of storms (ii13), water from the rock (ii10). If Adomnán is understanding an eschatological content to these passages, and associating this with Columba, we can begin by supposing that he is understanding the biblical original to contain whatever eschatology their original collectors intended. Our difficulty here of course is that these very close-to-biblical tales do not help us to see into Adomnán's theological mind as he may simply be adopting biblical stories and re-fashioning them with Columba as the central character, and placed in a Gaelic context. We cannot determine directly with *these* tales that he has an eschatological kingdom in process of realisation in mind. However, there are a number of stories with no obviously direct origin in biblical narrative, or in other extant early Christian writings. Given no demonstrable secular origin (see my section on Plummer), and the accepted importance of the Bible on Iona, we may posit that they flow from a biblical theology out of which Adomnán was operating, informed and shaped, but not directly provided by patristic writings.

#### *1. The Kingdom of God as good news to the poor.*

According to Luke, Jesus of Nazareth announced the agenda for his mission of establishing the kingdom by quoting the prophet Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...' (Luke 4:17, c.f. Mtt 5.3-10, the Beatitudes, and Mtt 14.13f, feeding the 5000). The tales of the stake (ii.37), cows (ii20, 21, below) & thief(i.41) can be read straightforwardly as material translations of this good news into divinely empowered action. The hungry are fed. The humble lifted. These characteristics are reflected in the *Amra*: 'he was a shelter to the naked, he was a teat to the poor' (VI.26-7). Thus Adomnán's description of the ministry of Columba includes this inaugural element of the conditions of the kingdom.



## 2. *The Kingdom of the God of the marvellous harvest*

A group which most obviously contain an eschatological reference, and which may therefore contain the concept of a Kingdom in process of realisation are those concerning nature in the process of perfection: Book two opens with a triplet of tales of the marvellous transformation of nature; we will consider two of them.

### *i. The fruit tree, ii.2*

In VC ii2 we have a tale which may relate directly to the etymological discussion above. Columba is described as responding to a complaint of the people living on the southern side of the Ionan foundation of Durrow. Here was a tree which bore much fruit, but fruit which was bitter and hurtful. Columba goes to the tree in the autumn, its natural season for fruiting, and, raising his holy hand, blesses it, saying,

In the name of almighty God thou bitter tree, may all thy bitterness leave thee, and thy fruit, hitherto most bitter, now become most sweet.

The fruit becomes wonderfully sweet, *'more quickly than words, and at the same moment'*. Adomnán's primary concern is, as ever, to show the saint's sanctity, this time manifested in power over nature. However, Adomnán shows his customary care over the source of the transformation being not the power of Columba himself, but that of God whom he invokes. The saint is, once again, a channel through whom God works in his creation. The point of particular interest here is the form of this manifestation as the transformation of nature from bitterness to sweetness. More especially its application to the fruit of a flower should be noted, the possible reference of this being to the fruitfulness of life lived by active faith which manifests the kingdom, and the linked eschatological reference to the transformation of nature which will come about as the kingdom is realised fully in the eschaton. A first-fruit example is the physical transformation of the fruit on the tree. Amos 9:14 is an example of eschatological expectation linked to fruit:

And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit [them]; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

Moses was instrumental in God's transformation of the bitter lake of Marah into sweet water, (Ex 15.23ff) which may be a model from which Adomnán is working, however, apart from the adjectival change, there is little else of similarity here. Adomnán is keen to stress that it was not anything so naturalistic as the ripening of the fruit over time that he records here. On the contrary, the transformation is instantaneous, at the point of invocation of God. An ecclesio-political conjecture here could be that Adomnán is allegorically referring to a church or community not owing allegiance to Iona proximal to Durrow which Columba brings into his familia, thus sweetening the fruit, as it were. Alternatively, and perhaps with more congruence

with similar encounters in Pictland, this could be the remnant of a contest with the druids. The Song of Moses contains a reference to the enemies of Israel:

For their vine comes from the vine of Sodom, and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison, their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of serpents, and the cruel venom of asps. (Deuteronomy 32:32-33).

Now the response to this bitterness in the song of Moses is not healing, but punishment, so though this passage might provide a clue to a further allegory, it does not explain the 'healing' of the fruit. The story of Jesus' curse of the fig tree is another possible reference model, but again, though a fruit tree is involved, the fig tree had no fruit, and was out of season, the evangelist's point being the unfruitful nature of Israel that would lead to its being passed over by God, and Jesus is not pictured as transforming it. No other literary source has thus far been suggested as Adomnán's model, so we may take this as his own tale, and as either reporting a received tradition, or at the very least his own idea of what Columba's ministry demonstrated. Even if he did have a source, as yet unidentified, outwith the Columban tradition, he has adopted this image for his own purpose.

Biblical eschatology anticipates a time when the earth will be transformed/re-created (Mt. 19.28), and all that is in it restored/transformed to perfection as the Kingdom of God is finally fulfilled. The earth will be released from the curse under which it suffers as a result of rebellion against the creator (Rom. 8.19-23). Wolves eating with lambs (Isa 11.6, 65.25); mountains flowing with sweet wine (Joel 3.18, Amos 9.13); abundant crops, fruit (Amos 9.13) etc. represent a fraction of the available biblical imagery of this new heaven and earth. The New Testament writers present the marvels of Jesus as inbreakings of this kingdom into the present age, as first-fruits of the heavenly kingdom; as its works and signs. Jesus himself is the eschatological God coming into the world, and his death and resurrection act out man's ultimate destiny. The age of the church is the age of the Spirit, in whom Christians participate in the eternal life of the age to come. By the Spirit they make the eschatological future of creation known in proclamatory mission to the ends of the earth, so all men may hear and receive, as the kingdom is being established. (and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:23). 'The Spirit is the first fruit of the full harvest'.<sup>37</sup>

It must be significant to our understanding of Adomnán that he opens his work with a direct reference to the establishment of the kingdom, as consisting in the flowering of

---

<sup>37</sup> R.J. Bauckham *NBD* (2nd ed.) 343. See cap. 4 below.

faith, and in his second preface, carefully and deliberately presents Columba as a bearer of the Spirit, as a bearer of the one who makes the presence of the kingdom manifest in this age, while pointing to the age to come. In presenting this marvel of the transformation of bitter, damaging fruit into sweet, beneficial fruit, and given its originality *vis á vis* scripture, Adomnán may be seen to be standing in the tradition of the New Testament writers, and is showing Columba as one who continues to demonstrate the incipient presence of the kingdom. In him and in his acts, says Adomnán, the kingdom is seen to flower, to be manifested, to be bearing fruit which points towards the awaited day of the Lord when Christ returns and completes the work he began.

on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; (Revelation 22:2-3).

That he appears to be presenting an original mode of manifestation of this eschatological concept suggests that the theology of an inaugurated, partially realised kingdom is embedded in his own theological makeup, and also points to the genuineness of the tradition he records.

Now, my task is to show that this reading of Adomnán is not overly subjective, and that it can be identified clearly in the rest of the VC. Thus, we will proceed to an examination of other tales in order to test the hypothesis. In this way, I hope to show that in Adomnán there was a more sophisticated purpose behind the collection of marvellous stories than the conventional accreditation of the sanctity of a saint.

#### *ii. Rapidly growing grain, ii3*

Adomnán presents the tale of the super-naturally rapid growth of grain. It is after mid-summer. As recompense for bundles of withies taken from the land of the layman Findchán, Columba sends about 54 litres<sup>38</sup> of seed-grain from the Ionan storehouse, with instructions to sow it in ploughed land. Adomnán explicitly mentions Findchán's doubt about the sense of sowing so late in the season, as being 'against the nature of this land', thus showing his own awareness of the unusual nature of the miracle he is to describe. However, his wife encourages him to follow Columba's bidding, 'to whom the Lord will grant whatever he may ask of him.' The messengers deliver a word of prophecy from Columba, who had foreknown the incredulity, saying, 'Let

38 'bis terni modii (Six measures)'. A&A make a Roman measure equivalent to 'a little under 2 English gallons', making a little under 12 gallons. @4.546 l/gal, this produces 54.552 l. The quantity also occurs in i41 in Columba's funeral gifts to a thief.

that man trust in the omnipotence of God. His crop, although sown after fifteen days of the month of June have passed, will be reaped in the beginning of the month of August'. Needless to say, having obeyed, though Adomnán says '*contra spem*, (against hope)',<sup>39</sup> he reaps a harvest after only six weeks of growth. The marvel is perhaps the more to be noted if we take Sharpe's suggestion for the identity of the location as 'thorn headland',<sup>40</sup> which may suggest land of poor quality.

Here the eschatological element is clearly present, the result of Columba's prayer, and of 'trust in the omnipotence of God'.<sup>41</sup> The biblical background can be seen in the following examples:

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. (Jeremiah 31:12).

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. (Amos 9:13, and see Hosea 2:21-22).

There is no direct biblical source for the tale Adomnán relates. He is presenting the concept of a condition of the eschatological kingdom being made present in his own age. An interesting contrast is shown by the following:

They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns, they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the LORD." (Jeremiah 12:13).

Here, the opposite condition is pertaining. Sharpe's suggestion of the meaning of the name of the place, 'thorn headland' leads us to an interesting conjecture of possible reference to the overturning of the condition of this prophesy of the doom awaiting an unrepentant, disbelieving Israel with the statement of the opposite in Columba who brings the kingdom, and the trusting Findchán who accepts the omnipotence of God, and thus ceases his rebellion against the source of life. As a result, he 'sows among thorns, and reaps wheat', as it were, as a result of God's grace, a thought reminiscent of Isaiah's prophecy of the eschaton:

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off. (Isaiah 55:13).

39 meaning against natural possibility, or against nature, unlike A&A who have 'without hope' which suggests the man did not trust in God's omnipotence as instructed by Columba.

40 Sharpe(1995)n.214.

41 Adomnán refers to the omnipotence of God in five places, all in book ii: ii3, 12, 34, 42, 43.



### 3. *The Kingdom of God in the kingdom of animals*

Adomnán relates a number of tales which show Columba or his colleagues interacting with the animals: a whale i19; seals, whethers & cattle i41; a crane i48;<sup>42</sup> healing cows ii4; a bull ii17; fish ii19; the 105 cows ii20, 21; a boar ii26; snakes ii28, iii23; a river-monster ii27; wild animals caught on a stake ii37; sea creatures ii42; Columba's horse iii23. These tales illustrate a complex relationship to the non-human creation. It allows repulsion (whale i19; river-beast ii27; boar ii26; sea creatures ii42) or slaughter (whethers & seals i41; fish ii19; cattle ii20, 21; stake ii37) for food, resource or protection, (with the incongruous exception of ii29: the knife that will not wound), while not espousing cruelty or unnecessary harm, and recognising common creatureliness (i19). I wish to suggest that incorporated in these tales of interaction with the animal creation, is an eschatologically oriented element which makes the conditions of the eschaton partially present. In other words, the conditions of the consummated kingdom of God are being presented as being manifested by the blossoming of faith.

#### *i. The snakes of Iona*

An illustration of Adomnán's concept of the eschatological kingdom is provided by his account of the fate of snakes on Iona at Columba's hand (ii.28, iii23). In the primary tale, amongst an apparently random collection of tales about the boar, the water beast, and the dagger (ii26-ii29), Columba comforts the brothers saddened by his prophesy regarding his own imminent death by blessing the island, and specifically affecting the snakes thereupon. Chronological aspects of this tale in relation to the sagas have been discussed above. Reeves (1857, 142 note d), corrected by Fowler<sup>43</sup> notes Solinus' third century reference to the absence of snakes in Ireland. Fowler notes Bede's reference (*EH* i1), and discusses Ireland's herpetology. Sharpe (1995, n.276) notes the commonplace of a saint's blessing removing snakes, noting Florentius' prayer that kills snakes in his area (*GG Dial.* iii.15). O'Reilly (1997) sees the two references as an example of Gregorian ethico-spiritual allegorical miracle. The narrative forms a spiritual and allegorical exegesis of the biblical eschatological narratives concerning snakes. Adomnán testifies to his community's continued faithfulness to Christ's command, and recapitulates the calling. (95-7) Gilbert Markus noted the event as a

42 Kelly (1988) 60 notes from the Law tracts that druidic sorcery may be effected through *corrguinecht*, a term which means "heron (or crane) killing". It involves standing on one leg, one arm raised, one eye closed, mimicing the crane's posture. The similarity of this with druidic prophetic practice from *Da Choca* (above) is striking. This may form a background to Adomnán's tale here, showing Columba as the anti-Druid, reviving rather than killing the sacred bird, another eschatological feature. Meek (1997) sees the significance of the crane in \*

43 Placing Solinus correctly in the third century (*Polyhist.* xxii. Fowler also mentions Ussher having given the credit to Joseph of Arimathea *Works*, vi.300; and a full discussion of the subject in Messingham, *Florileg. Insulae SS* (1624) p.127-134, and Colgan, *Tr.Th* p.255.



prevention of snakes from harming other creatures, as a demonstration of the unnatural harmony between Columba and animals on Iona.<sup>44</sup>

The prophecy over Niul in the Irish origin myth is that snakes in Ireland would not have venom, while recording the total absence of snakes from Ireland from Patrick's time onward. Jocelyn makes Patrick the one who expels all snakes and many reptiles from Ireland as a whole. Florentius kills all the snakes in his area, and has their corpses carried away by birds. Commentators up until O'Reilly and Markus have assumed a similar fate for Ionan snakes. In contrast, snakes simply flee from Honoratus on Lérins.<sup>45</sup> Adomnán's tale, on the contrary, is much more subtle than a wholesale purging:

...raising both his holy hands [Columba] blessed all this island of ours, and said:  
 "From this moment of this hour, *all poisons of snakes shall be powerless to harm men or cattle (omnia viparum venina aut hominibus aut pecoribus nocere poterunt)*<sup>46</sup> in the lands of this island, so long as the inhabitants of that dwelling-place shall observe the commandments of Christ. (ii.28)

The effect is confirmed in the final chapter of the Life:

And from then to the present day, as has been written in the above-mentioned book, the poison of three-forked tongues of vipers has *not been able to do any injury to either man or beast (aut homini aut pecori)*.<sup>47</sup>

He records the result of Columba's blessing as being not the extermination of snakes on Iona, nor even the complete elimination of their venom. Rather the blessing brings about the future inability of the venom of snakes to *harm man or cattle* on the island. Venomous snakes deprived of effective venom with which to paralyse their natural prey would be unlikely to survive; they would starve to death and die out rather cruelly. Hence O'Reilly's improvement on her predecessors,

Columba does not banish snakes but renders them harmless to all creatures on the island – men and beasts – evoking the paradisaical peace of the new creation ... (Isa 11.8-9)

while noting the evocation correctly, misses Adomnán's subtlety, and the true nature of the eschatological kingdom. If snakes became harmless to all creatures, they would cease to exist, at least in their 'old' earthly habit. This story accepts the presence of venomous snakes on Iona, and their retention of venom necessary for their own habit in the 'old' earth. But divine grace brings through Columba divine protection against

44 *Spes Scotorum* 1997.

45 *Life* by Hilary §15, *PL* 50, tr. Hoare, 260.

46 Translators are unanimous in rendering 'men or *cattle*' here.

47 VCii23 125a. Translators are unanimous in rendering 'men or *beast*' here. Adomnán's other uses of the term (i38, ii4, ii28, ii29, ii37) refer to cattle, so we can take it he means domestic herds in both of these instances, not 'all creatures' as O'Reilly makes it. (see discussion).

the harmful affect of snake venom on man *or cattle*,<sup>48</sup> the latter being important to the insular economy which has to continue in the inaugurated but not-yet consummated kingdom. O'Reilly sees Adomnán as writing symbolically, Columba's blessing 'makes present ... Christ's work of redemption which fulfilled the prophesy of the [Genesis] serpent's defeat'. (96) The redemption of Christ establishes the kingdom on Iona. This has a completely different point to the concept of expulsion, extermination, or de-venoming. The habit of the Ionan venomous snake is not interrupted; his presence is not terminated; only the effect of a strike on an animal not the normal prey of the snake is affected.

O'Reilly notices Antony's and Gildas' depictions of Arianism, and Bede / Prosper's denouncement of Pelagius as snakes spreading the poisonous discord of heresy (96). She conjectures that Adomnán's tales, set in the context of the divisive Easter dispute, call for a return to the original harmony established by Columba, paralleling Antony's similarly structured call to his followers (97). These metaphors are, of course, all prefigured by Christ and his herald to the intransigent Pharisees (Mtt 3.7, 12.34, 23.33&/). If this is the correct interpretation, and it looks attractive, we must take it that Adomnán is saying that there were/are snakes on the island, dissenters, heretics, threats to harmony, but that their power to harm was once blocked by Columba, and it has never been harmful to his day. It is an act of bravado, a declaration that unorthodoxy will not damage Iona's life. That Iona had resisted change to the catholic Easter for much of the century, and that Adomnán was personally unsuccessful in his desire to bring about conformation make his preaching somewhat hollow, if finally prophetic. An alternative allegorical interpretation would make the snakes the priests of the old religion, the druids whose magic Columba neutralised. This would harmonise with Carney's theory of the fashioning of these priests in Irish literature after the likeness of their biblical counterparts, (see chap.2 above), and would not give Adomnán any difficulty in that their influence on Iona was evidently gone. Difficulties with these spiritual allegorical understanding of Adomnán here are two fold. Firstly his models, if such they are: John, Christ, Gregory, Athanasius's Antony, Gildas, Bede, Prosper are all explicit in their use of a metaphor of snake for intransigent heresy or heretic. Adomnán openly refers to Columba's struggle with Druids in Pictland, but without the metaphor, and makes no decipherable hint here or anywhere of 'heresy' on Iona. Two, if the hint is contained here, its extreme subtlety makes one wonder at how effective it could be as a didactic tool. It may be that it is the interpreter

---

48 (Souter(291) records that from Tertullian onwards, *pecus*, *pecoris* was used to refer to a foetus; though there is no context for it in the VC, it may be possible that we see Adomnán here saying it was neither men *nor their offspring* who were harmed?)

reading in such an interpretation so as to bring the narrative into an interpretative epistemological framework which accords not with seventh century Christian, but modern categories.

The clear precedent can be found in a tradition which certainly preceded Adomnán, and which we can be virtually certain he would have known, as both Markus and O'Reilly recognise in what they see as symbolic form in the text. I cite further biblical precedent which shows the tale as an eschatological declaration, one of many signs of the coming of the kingdom:

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; ... behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy....The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD. (Isaiah 65:17a, 18b, 25).

And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. (Hosea 2:18).

Both Isaiah and Hosea here look forward to the New Earth, partial signs of which are realised, in Adomnán view, on Iona: joy is known (see below), the serpent does not destroy, but it is not yet eating dust. The conditions of this New Earth are seen to be established in partial form at the coming of Christ in a passage particularly important to reading the VC, as we will see:

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation...And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents... it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." ... And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen. (Mark 16:15, 17-18, 20).

One of the earliest apostolic delegates is recorded as experiencing the power of the new kingdom in which he is working as precisely the effect Adomnán describes for Iona:

Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, when a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. ... He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. (Acts 28:3-5).

For protection to be maintained on Iona, the commandments of Christ will need to be followed, but the protection appears to have been limited to this island, and not to extend across a whole territory of influence, as with Niul or Jocelyn's Patrick. Thus we have Adomnán claiming that on this holy mountain of I, the inbreaking eschatological conditions of the kingdom of God have been made present through

Columba, but that their continuation depends on the maintenance of a holy relationship with their true source. Venomous snakes, as part of the creation, are not exterminated, but now live in heaven-like harmony with man and his domesticated property. Adomnán may be employing an exquisitely subtle code to proclaim a non-material, spiritual message. He might also be seen to be recording his belief in the coming of a real eschatologically inbreaking kingdom to the ends of the earth, proclaimed, with signs following.

ii. *The disabled knife (ii.29)*

In three other chapters of the *VC*, Adomnán refers to effects on men and cattle. As we follow the establishment of the eschatological kingdom in Adomnán's collection of interactions with the animal creation, we consider the curious tale of the disabled dagger (ii.29) which closes a small series before Adomnán moves on to a consideration of Columba's healing ministry. In this tale, brother Molua comes to Columba – who is engaged in copying a book – to ask a blessing on an iron tool (*ferrum*). Columba absent mindedly reaches out his pen,<sup>49</sup> makes the sign of the cross, and says a blessing, all without taking his eyes off the page. After Molua has gone, Columba asks his attendant what it was that he'd blessed. On hearing that it was a knife for slaughter, he replies:

I trust in my Lord that the implement I have blessed will not hurt either man nor beast

(*nec homini, nec pecori nocebit*).

This proves to be the case, and as a consequence, the monks overlaid<sup>50</sup> other tools with the metal of the first, rendering them harmless to flesh, 'because the efficacy of that blessing of the saint continued.' The sense of the tale would suggest that from this time on, no more beasts were slaughtered on Iona, and indeed that no more meat was eaten if it had been eaten previously.<sup>51</sup> Molua had presumably supposed that the blessing would make his knife more effective, for a cleaner and quicker slaughter. On discovering the actual effect, and presumably assuming Columba's, and God's will to

49 O'Reilly has recently pointed out the significance of the pen as an instrument of the application of God's Word, referring to Ps.44/5.1 (*Spes Scotorum* 1997).

50 Fowler(1894) 97 n.4, believes the knife in question was actually of bronze thus allowing literalness in Adomnán's description; Sharpe insists that *ferrum* must mean iron. A&A(1991)p.136 n.166, following Sharpe(1995)n.282, note using Scott the probability that Adomnán's description of distributing melted iron should be taken as a terminological transfer from bronze work, and must only actually refer to softened iron. The puzzle remains as Adomnán unostentatiously but definitely refers to a hot fire (*ignis calore*) and says the monks distributed the iron of the knife melted (*liquefactus*). Could it be that Adomnán has another nature miracle in mind? This is unlikely as he makes nothing of the fact, except its occurrence. If however *liquefactus* taken to mean 'softened' (see L&S 1069, *liquefacio* IIB), then the knot is slackened. However, the practicality of distributing a thin coating of softened iron onto all the tools in the monastery remains to be investigated.

51 See MacDonald's debate with Sharpe in MacDonald(1997)35-6, and the archaeological evidence discussed by McCormick(1997)56-60, & 62.



be the general disabling of tools to hurt flesh, they go to the trouble of distributing the blessed blunting metal around the whole monastic 'armoury'. The tale contradicts others which suggest that slaughter was normal practice on Iona, e.g. i41, and on Columba's travels, e.g. ii19, ii20-1, ii26, ii37. The timing of the tale is unknown, the only information being that from the time of the blessing onward, the tools were unable to harm flesh, (though their continued use in harvesting grain and other horticulture or culinary use would not, by this stricture, be affected). If, later, animals were kept and consumed on Iona, new tools must presumably have been obtained. This inconsistency and possible lack of attention to circumstantial detail contrasts with Adomnán's accustomed care. The question left to my mind, however, is whether we have here another example of Adomnán presenting a condition of the eschatological kingdom being brought into realisation through Columba, but one which, unusually, does not take account of the effect of the story on wider conditions.

And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. (Hosea 2:18).

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall *beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks*; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; (Micah 4:1-3).

The image here is not, of course, at all precise. This singular eschatological promise is unique in the scriptures, coming in the overwhelming context of multiple metaphorical references to the sword being used to refer to coming judgements of various sorts both on the people of God, and on their enemies in return for unrepentant sinful living. Micah, and most other references to the sword in the scriptures, refers to human carnage, rather than to the slaughter of beasts for food. Adomnán's tale refers not to war or judgement at all, but is rather set in a domestic insular context. He speaks of melting the iron blade and applying it to others in order to convey the blessing, in an imputation of anachronistic iron working skills.<sup>52</sup> The carrying of a blessing in material objects is common in Adomnán's thinking, so the concept is no more or less magical than his other references to similar *eulogia*. Despite these objections, we may yet be seeing another reference, albeit perhaps unconscious,

---

<sup>52</sup> Sharpe(1995) note 282.



to the conditions which are promised for the mountain of the Lord in the future kingdom. Many come to the house of the Lord's representative to learn God's ways (Micah 4.2). The blessing of God is transmitted through the holy one so in tune with the divine that an absent minded shake of the pen is enough to convey it the island community. The promise of the Word of God is thereby applied. Blades are made unable to do damage to man or beast (Micah 4.3), and man and beast are at peace in a return to a pre-fall, eschatological diet (Gen 1.29-30).

*iii. Sea monsters*

The story of the great whale (i.19) ostensibly deals with Columba's gift of prophetic foreknowledge, and the wisdom of heeding his warnings. The brother Berach and his crew foolishly ignore Columba's warning not to sail to Tiree across the passage but to proceed around the Treshnish islands, and are nearly sunk by the prophetically expected huge whale. A second party led by Baithéne, prior of Iona's daughter abbey on Tiree, also receive the prophetic information, but he answers: 'I and the beast are in God's power.' Columba does not warn them to avoid the whale, but says, in contrast: 'Go in peace, your faith in Christ will protect you from this danger.' When he encounters the whale, which of course terrified his companions, he 'without a tremor of fear raised his hands and blessed the sea and the whale', which wisely withdrew without harming anyone.

The blessing with which the undaunted Baithéne greets and repels the whale may be compared with the similar repulsion of the water beast of the Ness in ii27. Here Columba raises his holy hand, draws the saving sign of the cross in the empty air, and in the name of God, commands the beast to proceed no further. It complies, but in contrast to Baithéne's whale's peaceful departure is described as fleeing terrified 'as if pulled back with ropes.' A third encounter with monstrous animals is contained in the tale of Cormac's voyages (ii42) where he encounters exceedingly dangerous small creatures, about the size of frogs, with a powerful, thrusting 'sting'.<sup>53</sup> Here the danger is averted neither by destruction of the objects of terror, nor by repulsion, but by the omnipotent God changing the direction of the wind at the imprecation of the brothers on distant Iona, and thus rescuing the beleaguered sailors. So, in each of these three encounters with danger brought by animals, the response has been to return the two parties to a safe distance where danger will be averted, rather than to curse and destroy. The attitude has been conservative towards nature, but in each case, God's relationship with man and beast has played a central part in the response. In the first, the common relationship of the creaturely to God is acknowledged. Thus

---

<sup>53</sup> see A&A(1991) n.191.

the place of both man and beast as cocooned in God's power was recognised as reason enough, when accepted, for the voyage to proceed in safety. There are echoes of Psalm 103/4.24-26 here.

O LORD, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, which teems with things innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan which thou didst form to sport in it.

The actual encounter brought the response of blessing as distinct from cursing, and the result was peace. This peaceful outcome is perhaps emphasised by Adomnán's use of the term '*(a)equor*' for the sea, which may contain the idea of the flat calm surface of the sea<sup>54</sup> which Baithéne blesses. In this, we may discern the partial pre-figuring of the eirenic eschatological relationship between man and beast towards which Christian thinkers such as Adomnán were hoping. (See Isa 11 above, and: 'You ... need not fear the beasts of the earth. For ... the wild animals will be at peace with you.' (Job 5:22-23)) This is the first indication of an eschatological element in Adomnán's animal tales; the commonplace encounter with wild beasts, represented in ii26 where a wild boar is slain (in contravention of the myth of animal loving Celtic Christians), is replaced by the hand of blessing and harmony. A subsidiary note is that the hand raised to bless belongs not to Columba, the subject of the life, but to Baithéne. Adomnán thus shows his understanding of the benefits of eschatological pneumatic power to be not restricted to his hero alone, but present in the ministries of others.

The tale of the water beast is not convincing in this light with the repulsion of the beast in terror. However, the tale is set in the context of the account of Columba's bringing the (new) kingdom of God into flower within the (old) Pictish kingdom of Bruide, and Adomnán demonstrates the conditions of the new kingdom in the manner in which Columba brings the beast under control in the name of its creator, with the saving sign of the cross by which this kingdom was established. The ropes may echo God's reply to Job (cap.40/41). He is also depicted as offering God's protection to Luigne in the face of danger, which may be pre-figured by the eschatological promises of the psalmist, now applied by Adomnán to the one who brings the kingdom of God into Pictland:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night,

---

54 L&S 58.

nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.... You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. ... For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. ... Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honour him. (Psalms 91:1-15).

*iv. The white horse*

We must make reference to the closing tale of the VC wherein Adomnán describes Columba's relationship with the white horse (iii23, 127b-128a):

It went to the saint, and strange to tell put its head in his bosom, inspired, as I believe, by God, before who every living creature has understanding, with such perception of things as the creator himself has decreed; and knowing that its master would presently depart from it, and that it should see him no more, it began to mourn, and like a human being to let tears fall freely on the lap of the saint, and foaming much, to weep aloud. When he saw this, the attendant began to drive away the weeping mourner; but the saint forbade him, saying, "Let him, let him that loves us, pour out the tears of most bitter grief here in my bosom. See, man though you are, and having a rational soul, you could by no means know anything of my departure except what I myself have even now disclosed to you. But to this brute and unreasoning animal the Creator has, in what way he would, revealed clearly that its master is going to depart from it". Thus speaking, he blessed his servant the horse, as it turned sadly away from him.

The tale forms part of what Smyth describes as 'one of the most moving narratives in the whole of Dark Age historical literature.'<sup>55</sup> Although this is the earliest prophetic horse in the extant Irish record,<sup>56</sup> and the tale is mainly illustrative of the prophetic in Adomnán's conception, I have included it here as a final though rather tentative example of the eschaton breaking out on Iona in Adomnán's zoological thoughts. Negatively, the tale is of bitter grief at the loss in this life of the horse's beloved master, and thus is focused not on the eschaton, but in the present. However, we should not miss Adomnán's description of the horse coming to put its head in Columba's bosom and weeping, which Adomnán describes as '*mirum dictu* (strange to tell)', using one of the stock phrases for a marvellous event. Adomnán discerns the cause as God's revelation of non-rationally discernible knowledge to the 'brute and unreasoning animal'. So, we have a special relationship between man and beast, one of the stock images of the eschaton already discussed, plus supernatural revelation to a

<sup>55</sup> Smyth(1984)115.

<sup>56</sup> see Sharpe(1995)n.408, on Mayer.

beast, which has resonance (albeit fleeting) with the marvellous talking ass of Balaam (Num 22.28). On its own, this tale would not present a strong case for the presence of the kingdom on Iona, but taken with the foregoing as guides to interpretation, may be seen to add something to my case.

*v. The multiplication of cows*

An intriguing couplet of tales concern the marvellous multiplication of the few cows of two poor laymen (ii.20, 21). In the first, Nesán is rewarded for the hospitality he offers Columba. The latter raises his holy hand and blesses five little cows, prophetically declaring their increase to 105, and the blessedness of the man's seed. In the second very similar tale, which Adomnán insists is a distinct occurrence,<sup>57</sup> Colmán also provides hospitality, and is similarly blessed. This time his sons and grandsons are also blessed with 'fruitfulness'. The opening of the sequel ii.22 confirms that, 'the power of [Columba's] blessing raised [Colmán] from poverty to wealth.' Adomnán adds the note that the predetermined number of cows could not be increased by any means; unless used by the respective households, any surplus beasts were lost. Both tales also attract sequels which show: the penalties of rejecting the values of the kingdom (Vigen was parsimonious; Ioan oppressed Colmán, and sacked his house three times); the penalty of rejecting Christ and his bearers, (Vigen slighted Columba and did not receive him as a guest;<sup>58</sup> '[Ioan] despised Christ in his servants'); and the consequent withdrawal of any blessing that reception of the kingdom might otherwise have brought. In the first case, a contrast is drawn between the poor man who became wealthy as a result of receiving the blessings of the kingdom, with a tenaciously rich man who refused hospitality to Columba, whose judgement was to become poor, and who would suffer a violent, unprotected death.<sup>59</sup> Colmán himself is the focus of the sequel to his story which again concerns a detractor of Columba in a story with political connotations. Ioan son of Conall, son of Domnall, oppresses Columba's ward Colmán, and refuses to yield to Christ's bearer, scorning him. As a result of Columba's prayer 'to the Lord', Ioan and his crew came under near immediate judgement, and, having refused the kingdom of God, were

<sup>57</sup> Scholarly opinion dismisses Adomnán's insistence, believing the two to have derived from a single folk-tale

<sup>58</sup> e.g. 'If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.' (Matthew 10:14, ). Luke's parallel has: 'But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near."' (Luke 10:10-11, ). The latter clearly links the nearness of the kingdom with the refusal of hospitality and refusal to accept its messengers. Thus Adomnán has a clear biblical model for the two cautionary tales, and both may be seen to be linked to Jesus teaching on the coming of the kingdom in its bearers.

<sup>59</sup> A&A note their opinion that, though absent from MS A, this insertion was very possibly by Adomnán himself, so I treat it here as such.



snatched down to hell, the kingdom of Satan.

#### 4. *The Kingdom of God in Healings*

The marvellous healings of the VC provide a further set of images which conjure up the picture of the establishment of the kingdom in Columba's time, as they do for the New Testament. Christ inaugurated his ministry with the words from the LXX Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19).

The motif of release from oppression is commonly interpreted to mean, in part, healing from illness, and the year of the Lord's favour to refer to the coming of the kingdom. When asked by John's disciples if he was the one who was to come (to inaugurate the kingdom), he replied:

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me. (Luke 7:22-23).

Jesus sends out his own disciples, 12 and 72, to proclaim the kingdom and heal the sick:

and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. (Luke 9:2);  
heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' (Luke 10:9).

Thus there are irrefutable grounds for associating healing with the presence of the kingdom in the Synoptics, and we know of the importance of these documents to the Ionan church. Athanasius likewise presents Antony as one through whom God healed. He emphasises that it was not Antony himself who healed, but God in answer to his prayer and calling on the name of Christ (VA 84). (cf.ii Without here going into detail, a confirmatory factor in the veracity of the tales of healing is that Adomnán is not at all exhaustive in the biblical echoes he collects, suggesting that those he does collect come from genuine traditions, and not from the imagination of his mind soaked as it would have been in biblical imagery. He records a whole range of non-biblical 'ailments': an unloving attitude (ii41), a bleeding nose (ii18), an inflammation of the eyes (ii7), a broken hip (ii5), a life-threatening childbirth (ii40); and some biblical echoes: mortal sickness (ii30, 31, 33), and even death itself (ii32). However, he misses healing from blindness, demonization, fever, leprosy, paralysis, and dumbness, which are biblically obvious. Adomnán is careful in each case to record that the source of healing is divine, God, the Lord, Christ. We can take the healings he records then, as being further examples of 'the flowering of faith'.



*i. The pestiferous cloud ii4*

One example is ii4 which focuses on a marvellous healing in a complex tale containing an eschatological image of the righting of all of creation, not simply restricted to humans, but to beasts of the field as well. The 'pestiferous cloud' deposits disease on man and beast alike, and the healing gift is conveyed, via the *pane benedicto / salubri pane* carried by Silnán, to both, as Columba specifically instructs. Thus many are healed.

And immediately recovering full health the men, saved with their cattle, praised Christ  
in Saint Columba, with very great rendering of thanks.

Sharpe alone translates the sentence differently: 'At once men and beasts regained their health, and praised Christ in St Columba with exceeding gratitude,' suggesting the beasts joined the men in praising Christ for their deliverance, a sense perfectly acceptable to Adomnán's text, and in tune with a biblical eschatological view of nature:

Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! ... Let them praise the name of  
the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. (Ps  
147/8:10, 13).

The economic importance of the cattle is surely a further element to be considered in understanding the impact of the healing on the human recipients. The people of the area were not only saved from a terrible suffering and death from disease, but their economy was also rescued from disaster. They have encountered the power of a God who was interested in their whole lives, and their response is spontaneous gratitude.<sup>60</sup> As is his habit, Adomnán does not tell us if this means the conversion of the people from a pagan to the Christian faith specifically, but whatever the situation, Christ, and Columba, were glorified through the manifestation of the kingdom, which was Adomnán's interest. Again, Adomnán has no direct models from the scriptures, but his story clearly contains biblical imagery of the eschaton as it is manifested by Christ through Columba, and as it is so manifested, it brings glory to the one who is its source, namely Christ, and also to his servant. The tale may also be seen to contain the eschatological element of demonstrating the kingdom being carried to the ends of the earth / to all the world, as the power of Christ is shown in Eastern Ireland. There may be political purpose here, as yet unidentified, but there is no need to turn to such devices to make sense of the tale; a higher administration is more clearly in view.

*ii. In the tale of resuscitation, (ii32) Adomnán may be presenting a picture of the continuing earnest of God to bring salvation to eternal life in the history of his own*

<sup>60</sup> Adomnán refers to *hominus & pecus* 'man and cattle' in five chapters in the VC illustrating their importance in his thought: ii4, ii28 & iii23, ii29, ii37.

immediate familia. Paul calls the resurrection of Jesus a first fruit anticipating that of believers (Rom 8.23, 1Cor 15.20, 23). Irenaeus believes the translation of Elijah, the preservations of Jonah and of Daniel et al, and the resurrection of Lazarus were earnest of God's promise of resurrection, acting as empirical confirmation of his power, promise and fidelity to unbelievers.<sup>61</sup> Thus the presence of this power, which is an earnest of the future eschatological resurrection, is demonstrated as being present on Iona in the resuscitation.

### 5. *The messengers of the Kingdom: Angels*

Columba's encounters with angels (and demons), are recorded in the second preface, and chapters i1, i3; ii33; iii(intro), iii1, 3-16, 22, 23. Adomnán seems only to consider two major categories of angel, namely 'angelic messengers' with whom Columba had intercourse, and their fallen counterparts, the demons. A differentiation between 'angels from the highest heaven' (iii14, 16, 19, 22) denoting origin in the throne room of the King of heaven, a claim of Columba's status, and others is evident,<sup>62</sup> but in the absence of any further subdivision it seems likely that he was not influenced by Dionysius.<sup>63</sup> Thus his angelology can be regarded as going back to a more primitive foundation. Bietenhard understands the NT to have taken over the Jewish concepts of angels:

representatives of the heavenly world and God's messengers. When they appear, the supernatural world breaks into this one. Because God is present in Jesus, his way on earth is accompanied by angels.<sup>64</sup> At his coming again they will be at his side<sup>65</sup> ...

They act on behalf of the Apostles<sup>66</sup> and make God's will known to them<sup>67</sup>

In this light, we might understand Adomnán's presentation of Columba as one who shared the company of angels, who sent them to do his bidding, and who was apprised of God's will by them, as being in full conformity with biblical practice. He

61 Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* v.v.2 & v.xiii.1. The latter also includes Irenaeus' exposition of the idea of earnest reception of a portion of the Holy Spirit, which causes a man to cry Abba. Complete grace of the Spirit will render men like Him.

62 cf. *Altus Prosator* 'Bonos creavit angelos ordines et archangelos principatum ac sedium potestatum virtutum' and 'Caeli de regni apice stationis angelicae' C&M 44.

63 The Pseudo-Areopagite's *Celestial Hierarchy*, which became a formative influence on Medieval angelology only became widely known in the West after Erigena's translation, though he was approved by Gregory I and Lateran IV (649). Dionysius' / Gregory the Great's nine-fold hierarchy of angels is not in evidence. For a recent discussion of 7th century Irish cosmology, see Marina Smyth, *Understanding the Universe in Seventh-Century Ireland*, (Boydell, Woodbridge 1996). pp. 88-93 contain her discussion of heavens. Adomnán would not appear to be familiar with the physical characteristics of the heavens in *Liber De Ordine Creaturarum*, nor of Isidore's *De Natura Rerum*. His highest heaven may, of course, derive from e.g. Psalm 148.4: 'laudate eum caeli caelorum (Praise him, you heavens of heavens)'.

64 Mtt 1.20; 2.13, 19; 28.2, 5; Mk 1.13; Lk 1.19; 2.9, 13; 22.43; Jn 1.51; cf. Acts 1.10.

65 Mtt 13.49; 16.27; 25.31; 2Thess 1.7.

66 Acts 5.19; 12.7-10.

67 Acts 8.26; 10.3-8; 27.27f. H. Bietenhard in Brown, *NIDNTT* I 102-103.

was showing Columba as one around whom the supernatural world broke into this world, in whom God, by his Spirit, was present. Thus, the kingdom of God becomes present where the apostolic Columba is present.

*i. Company of angels*

Picard interprets the topos of showing a saint in the company of angels as undeniable proof of sanctity in hagiography.<sup>68</sup> The introduction to book iii records:

...in this third book, concerning angelic apparitions, that *were revealed to others* in relation to the blessed man, or to him in relation to others, and concerning those that were made visible to both, though in unequal measure (that is to him directly and more fully, and to others indirectly and only in part, that is to say from without and by stealth)...

This process is illustrated in Columba's youth, trial, and on visit to Clonmacnoise:

During those days in which the saint was a guest in the monastery of Clóin, he prophesied...by revelation of the Holy Spirit...concerning some angelic visitations revealed to him, in which certain places within the enclosure of that monastery were frequented by angels at that time. (VC i1).

The tale is interpreted by Sharpe as propaganda for Columba's sanctity being demonstrated as he visits another familia. This perhaps misses the reference to the presence of angels in 'certain places' in the monastery, known to Columba, but showing the kingdom as supernaturally present there. It is not certain that their presence is only due to that of Columba; he merely makes their presence known. Two tales of angels as travelling-companions (iii3&4) are perhaps somewhat more obviously political in intent, showing the saints Bréndan of Birr and the venerable bishop Finnio seeing, apparently not in the natural, angels accompanying Columba in his pre-peregrinatory life in Ireland. The second is set during his youth; the first at his trial at the synod of Teltown, and includes a further reference to Adomnán's concept of Columba as a missionary saint who would, in words recorded as from Bréndan, 'be a leader of nations into life.' Both the Andersons and Sharpe chose here to translate *populorum ducem ad vitam* to refer to 'nations', thus, perhaps, rendering a political interpretation onto Adomnán's statement. Both Forbes and Fowler choose

<sup>68</sup> Picard(1981)94; he gives no reason for so saying. Picard has gained the impression that Columba 'passed his entire life in the company of guardian angels' (op.cit.), perhaps rather an over interpretation of Adomnán's presentation. Book III is the shortest of all, collecting 19 of the 21 examples of angelic appearances in the VC. iii1 concerns a vision of his mother; i3, ii33, iii6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 are visions of angels operating elsewhere than his presence; only iii3, 4, 5, 8, 15, 16 record direct encounters between the saint himself and angels. Now, in the epilogue to iii16, Adomnán mentions visits undiscernible to (ordinary) men, while Columba lay awake, or prayed alone. However, while believing the visits to be numerous in extent Adomnán clearly believes them to be limited especially to these occasions when Columba is alone. Even in the example he gives of Columba's guardian angel (iii15), Adomnán records him as saying not 'my angel' but 'Angelo domini qui nunc inter uos stabat'.

the more neutral 'people', which sits more naturally with the 'innumerable souls' of iii1. Adomnán intends to show Columba as a missionary saint who brings people into the salvation of the kingdom of God, and his accompaniment by God's supernatural messengers once again illustrates his point that where Columba was, there did the supernatural kingdom break in.

In ii16, Adomnán records the meeting with Columba of a large company of angels, as illicitly observed by one of the brothers :

For holy angels, citizens of the heavenly country (*sancti angeli caelestis patriae cives*, tr. Sharpe as 'citizens of the heavenly kingdom'), flew down with marvellous suddenness, clothed in white raiment, and began to stand about the holy man as he prayed. And after some converse with the blessed man, that heavenly throng, as though perceiving they were watched, quickly returned to the highest heaven.

The inclusion of the observer is a device Adomnán uses to illustrate that many other visitations happened unobserved by others, a note with which he closes the chapter. Once again, Adomnán has adequate scriptural background to the scenario, which explicitly presents his credentials as a man of renown, on the basis of his sharing in the society of the eschatological kingdom.

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? (Hebrews 1:14).

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (Hebrews 12:22).

For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matthew 16:27-28 & //s).

This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering-- since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, (2 Thessalonians 1:5-7).

#### ii. Agents:

Adomnán gives us a marvellous tale of Columba on Iona commanding an angel in the shortest prayer he records, '*Auxiliare, auxiliare*', (iii15) to rescue a monk whom he sees, by divine revelation, falling from a tower in distant Durrow. The holy man describes the wonder of what he sees as the angel speeds to catch the fortunate brother. Here, once again, we see Columba being presented as sharing characteristics



with Christ, who himself had authority to command angels:

Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:53).

Ps. 34 talks of rescue by the angel of the Lord, who will not allow the bones of the righteous man to be broken; in this tale, quite literally interpreted.

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them...He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. (Psalms 34:7, 20).

And again in Ps. 91, a further background appears:

For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. (Psalms 91:11-12).

The conditions of the kingdom are once again present. Conversely in ii33, an angel strikes Broichan, *magus* of the King of Picts, in divine response to his unyielding obstinacy. (see section f. below).

### *iii. Messengers:*

(a) The King's Robe. iii1 sees the appearance of an angel to announce the birth of the saint in a commonplace hagiographical device, with little significance in itself. However, the use Adomnán makes of the tale is important eschatologically, and may be seen to link closely with his prefatorial reference to the kingdom of God consisting in the flowering of faith, discussed above. The angel appears to Columba's mother in a dream, and gave her:

as it seemed, a robe of marvellous beauty, in which there appeared embroidered splendid colours, as it were of all kinds of flowers. And after some little space, asking it back, he took it from her hands. And raising it, and spreading it out, he let it go in the empty air. Grieved by losing it, she spoke thus to that man of reverend aspect: "Why do you so quickly take from me this joyous mantle?" Then he said: "For the reason that this cloak is of very glorious honour, you will not be able to keep it longer with you." After these words, the woman saw that robe gradually receded from her in flight, grow greater, and surpass the breadth of the plains, and excel in its greater measure the mountains and woods. And she heard a voice that followed, speaking thus: "Woman do not grieve, for you will bear to the man to whom you are joined by [the bond] of marriage a son, of such grace that he, as though one of the prophets of God, shall be counted in their number; and he has been predestined by God to be a leader of innumerable souls to the heavenly country (S: kingdom)." While she heard this voice, the woman awoke.<sup>69</sup>

*Peplum* is a term used generally to denote a wide upper garment, but is specifically

<sup>69</sup> a version of the tale appears in the Annals of Clonmacnoise, 590, though lacking the reference to flowers. (1993, 91-2).

used to refer to the splendid robe of state of the gods or human dignitaries; emperors or kings,<sup>70</sup> and with this would denote majesty, dominion or rule. The second term Adomnán uses for it, *sagum*, is less conclusive in itself as perhaps denoting the coarse woollen blanket of a servant, but *hoc sagum alicuius est tam magnifici honoris* would suggest Adomnán has in mind a military cloak used as a sign of warfare,<sup>71</sup> and to be worn by one of great or noble honour. Thus the image is of a robe, a vestment denoting rule, the ultimate ruler being the Lord God, King of Kings, who would one day come:

The day of the Lord, most righteous King of Kings, is at hand (*Altus Prosator*, Q, C&M 51)

The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. (Psalms 92/3:1-2)

I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. (Isaiah 6:1)).

Ps 44/5, which Columba chanted outside Bridei's palace (i37c) is filled with royal imagery, relating an earthly king to The Heavenly King. God's throne is eternal (v.8/7). The earthly king's robes (*vestimentum*) are of myrrh (*murra*), and myrrh-oil (*gutta*) and cassia (wild cinnamon) (v.9/8). This description primarily refers to the king's anointing with fragrant oils, but also evokes the image of the trees from which the oil is derived. It is a small step to imagining their blooming. Thus, the image of the robe decorated in flowers of all colours may be seen to represent kingly rule. Adomnán is not interested in presenting Columba with temporal jurisdiction, thus this image must represent the concept of the kingdom of God, and is thus symbolic of the kingdom which will be spread in conflict with opposing forces,<sup>72</sup> by one—predictably—of honour. In extraordinary beauty, a concept of the kingdom fully conversant with a Christian eschatological outlook, it depicts the bringing into being of all kinds of blossoming faith, i.e. conditions of the eschatological kingdom Adomnán opens his work with, nurtured through the ministry of this mother's son. The taking of the mantle away from the mother is both a sign of her need to let her son go on his pilgrimage away from Ireland, and of the impossibility of her holding on to the kingdom of God which will be established over an area extending well beyond the confines of her son's homeland, and which cannot be possessed by any human being. It spreads out beyond the confines of Ireland, indeed beyond the confines of the physical earth. In presenting this picture, Adomnán shows us that his conception of

70 L&S 1332.

71 L&S 1617.

72 That the coming of the Kingdom is envisaged as bringing conflict, see Lk 4.34-5; Mt 10.34; Jesus & his disciples' conflict with Satan and the religious rulers; Paul's conflict with paganism etc. This conflict is reflected often in the VC.

Columba's significance was far greater than a peregrination into ascetic exile. Rather, his leaving home and family is essential to the spreading of the kingdom of God, which will itself, as it grows and flowers, render the bringing of many souls into its membership. Adomnán presents Columba as the one through whom God, as represented by his divine messenger in this instance, will accomplish this task which is unquestionably missionary in focus, as distinct from eremitic. We may also read a political element in this image, as showing Columba's 'international' influence and importance, but again, this importance is founded upon the concept of a mission to establish the kingdom of God, a Kingdom which transcends the earthly territories, and which has the effect of 'saving' people embroiled in the temporal, for the far more significant eternal realm.

(b) Trance encounter. iii5 records an encounter with angels shared by numerous biblical characters, gathered around possibly the first record of a Christian ordination of a monarch.<sup>73</sup> Adomnán relates that the angel was seen 'in a trance of [Columba's] mind', instructing him to read the book of ordination of kings. When Columba refuses to ordain Áedán, he is struck by the angel, producing a physical scar on his side which remained all his life. The incident is repeated on two successive nights, and the angel emphasises that his command is from God. After the third vision, Columba is convinced it is of God, not his own imagination, and 'submitted to the word of the Lord'. He ordains, and blesses Áedán, whom he now accepts as, though not his own original choice, God's choice as king. Again, that there is a political element in the tale is accepted. What is more interesting to this discussion, however, is the precision with which Adomnán describes the encounter. The angel is seen 'in a trance of mind', i.e. it is an ecstatic experience, unlike most of the other angelic appearances. As such, Columba is recorded as having treated it in a different way. Though apparently having received the scar on the first night, he is not ready to accept the vision as genuinely of God until it is proved by triple repetition; it is not, apparently, the scar which makes him accept the divine source. (Adomnán is familiar with the concept of angels smiting men, as he shows in the tale of Broichán ii33, above, and it is not unknown in scripture, e.g. 'Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.' (Genesis 19:11)) Adomnán is thus concerned to show that Columba is not a credulous mystic, but as one who knows the wisdom of 'testing the spirits', ('Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of

73 For which, see Sharpe(1995) n.358, responding to Michael Enright; and Meckler(1990) who deals with the religious/political ramifications of the tale, dismissing the marvel in line with usual historian's line: 'whatever one wishes to make of the angels...'.

God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.' (1 John 4:1)), who is wary of deception: ('And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.' (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Columba is one who follows the tradition of Samuel, Gideon, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Peter, all of whom struggled with visions, Gideon and Zechariah specifically with mediatory angels. Once again, Adomnán is showing Columba as one who shares experience with these prophets and apostles of the biblical tradition, and places him directly in line of succession to the same type of experience of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. At the same time, in this instance, Columba is shown to be firmly in this world, and in need of his sanctified wits.

#### 6. *Foes of the Kingdom: Demons.*

Expulsion of demons (ii 11, 16, iii 8) is not in VC directly from people. O'Reilly (1997, 95) interprets Antony's discourse concerning demons (VA 21-43) to be an allegory for the achievement of ascetic discipline. It is 'spiritual combat', tramping the demonic serpents of ethical vice underfoot. This interpretation of the *Vita Antonii* leaves questions especially of the extent to which we, from our modern perspective, see allegory in such accounts, when the writer seems to refer to a real struggle with the demonic. Demons bring temptation, flattery, false prophesy. Antony sees Christ's words in Lk 10.19 (VA 30) as an allegory referring to doing battle with very real demons. Virtue is the defence. This interpretation of demonic reality fits Adomnán's account of Columba. The ascetic virtues are certainly in place, and form the ground upon which the marvellous manifestations are built, but the 'spiritual combat' takes place in a higher arena than the human soul.

i. iii 8 is unique in the VC, describing a battle with demons which is founded, as is well documented, upon Paul's description in Eph. 6. The Pauline concept of principalities and powers against which the faithful contend is clear in the *Altus Prosator* (B, C&M 44-5). The feature of note in this context is the way in which Adomnán describes the battle as proceeding. Columba goes off to pray in seclusion, (another open reference to the similarity with Christ in his servant, e.g. 'And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. (Mark 1:35).) He saw an array of innumerable demons making war on him, which the Spirit revealed to him were wishing to assault his monastery, to kill his brothers with the iron spits which they held. The battle raged back and forth most of the day, neither side being able to prevail, until 'angels of God' came to Columba's support. Fear of them drove the demons off the island. The Spirit further reveals to Columba that the



repulsed demons proceed to harry the monasteries on Tiree, intending to afflict the brothers with pestilential diseases, and that many would be killed. So it happened, with the exception of Abbot Baithéne's monastery, where as a result of his leadership, the community was defended by prayer and fasting, and only one died 'on this occasion'.<sup>74</sup>

The whole account both shows a familiarity with scriptural accounts of spiritual warfare (cf. Ps 90/1.6, above), and suggests a familiarity with its contemporary continuation, including viable defence strategies. The most obvious reference to the 'armour of the apostle Paul' which Columba took up (*accipio*), as Sharpe notes, reads:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, (Ephesians 6:10-18).

However, though the image of spiritual war, and of the demonic 'arrows' must have their home here, Paul has more weapons in his armoury:

All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one." (Romans 3:12). But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5:8). for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10:4).

i.e. it is the armour of the eschatological kingdom to which believers belong. Adomnán's tale is not a slavish copy of any of these images, but the fundamentals

<sup>74</sup> This account may be one place where we can observe an ecclesio-political element, in that it is ostensibly the Columban monastery on Tiree that is protected, whereas other foundations there probably owing allegiance to other founders are ravaged. The element is also present in Adomnán's concern over the regime of a Tiree monastery in his account of Artchain (i36). Two contrary views complicate the picture however. Adomnán is quite clear that Mag Luinge is protected by the action not of Columba himself, but of Baithéne his colleague who is presented as acting independently. Secondly, the posthumous protection of Pictland and Dalriada from the late seventh century plague depicted in ii46 is not restricted to Columban houses, but is viewed as a general benefit of the establishment among those peoples of Columban establishments, a factor which, apparently, does not protect Ireland.

remain. The struggle is against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Columba, having done everything to resist, stands in the face of attack. His ascetic purity is demonstrated. Adomnán is less interested than Paul in the metaphorical holology, and even the little he has differs. The demonic weapons *ferreís aciem / sudis* (iron spits / stakes) are not burning, and the terms are not vulgate (cf. Ps 90/1.6). The Vulgate gives *tela ignea* (fiery darts/javelins), i.e. hand held and thrown weapons, for Paul's *belé...pepyrómena* which can represent a bow-fired arrow or throwing dart. Nevertheless, they bring death, as Reeves noted from the Tíree sequel, by disease,<sup>75</sup> and it is their offensive capability which Adomnán wants to note. He makes no specific mention of an ethical dimension to the battle, though this must be assumed in his readers understanding of the armour of the apostle Paul, and as we have observed, although a constant presence in the VC, Columba's ethical virtue is never dwelt upon. Adomnán's interest, as in the rest of the work, is on the spiritual virtue = power exercised by the Spirit's activity in and through Columba as here he takes up the armour of God, and the kingdom is manifested:

The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18).

He does, however, describe precisely the essentially defensive nature of the panoply, which enable the holy man to stand firm despite massive assault. The context of this tale in the third book must suggest that Adomnán had in mind his patron's association with the light of God (Rom. 13,12; 1 Thess 5.8, above). Adomnán goes further than Paul in describing the intervention of the angelic host to repulse the demonic array. However, this too has an adequate scriptural model in Psalm 90/1 (above).

It is a curiosity that though, as we are seeing, Adomnán is concerned with sketching the spreading out of the kingdom of God, of which the expulsion of demons is a repeated New Testament image

But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.' (Matthew 12:28)

and a major apostolic commission bringing the kingdom

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God... (Luke 9:1-2)

he does not present Columba as himself able to repulse the demons, even while deploying the armour of God. In fact, in common with other early Irish hagiography, the expulsion of demons from people does not occur at all in the VC, an apostolic

---

<sup>75</sup> Reeves(1857)206 note b.

credential we would expect a composite Columba to have been given.<sup>76</sup>

Further notes of interest here are Baithéne's own success in defeating the attack on his own monastery, achieved, according to a revelation of the Spirit, by his God-aided management of prayer and fasting. Here is the clearest example of an apparent familiarity with the business of spiritual warfare, perhaps founded on the synoptic story of the failure of the disciples to drive out a demon: Mt 17.21 // Mk 9.29, 'this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting'. The spiritual wisdom of Baithéne is evidently not shared by his fellow Tireean priors, whose communities succumb to the attacks. Finally, both Columba, as head of the familia, and Baithéne as his lieutenant and successor, are only able to defend their own immediate community, a factor which might have bearing on our understanding of the exercise of authority and responsibility in the ecclesiology of the paruchia, though I will not pursue this here. This section of the tale contrasts with the posthumous miracle of protection of Columban establishments and their surrounding peoples/nations from the plague (ii46), with no hint of the lack of protection for non-Columban houses. (Evidently, Columba was regarded as more effective when operating from the throne room of God, than when on his old holy mountain, perhaps a feature which shows the developing cult of this saint; his power expands with his reputation, and his importance to the cult.) This tale is thus a further piece of evidence for the moving image Adomnán is creating of the spread of the kingdom of God as it overcomes opposing spiritual forces. Here it is the powers direct, as it were, perhaps metaphorically representing a plague of some sort which assaulted the familia; elsewhere, it is disease, injustice, hiddenness, sin, pagan religious adherence etc. which is defeated. They are all on the kingdom inaugurating agenda of Lk 4.18f.

### 7. *The Glory of the Kingdom: Heavenly Light*

The curious phenomenon Adomnán records as 'heavenly', or 'angelic light' occurs in iii(intro), iii2, 3, 11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23:130a, 131b, 132b, 135a. The purpose of

<sup>76</sup> Clare Stancliffe (1992)97, 102-110 interprets this as the result of the ascetic, Eastern/British prePelagian, and Biblical (especially OT) background of Irish Christianity and of the development of the concept of the ascetic predestined to sanctity, and thus in no need of temptation. She describes the *Life of Antony* and Cassian as the major channels through which this eastern 'more optimistic' anthropology came to Ireland (103). What she seems to mean is that the early Irish church, un-influenced by continental Christianity, had little or no demonic interest as pre-Christian Irish cosmology explained evil without resort to it, the mischievous *deaside* played their rôle. The demonic was a Christian category introduced by such as Adomnán reading continental *vitae*. VA, and Cassian however, give considerable attention to the demonic. Why would the hagiographers not record conflict with the Side, pagan equivalent of demons? In the light of Carney, were the Side a Christian interpolation. etc. Her analysis of the demonic in 'the Irish church' as applied to Adomnán, though she recognises his differences c.f Muirchu, Tirechan & Cog., is in need of further examination, see her p.106, c.f. VC ii11, 16, 17, 24, 34, 37; and 108 where she misses i39, ii24, ii37. Space does not permit this examination here.

including these tales is made explicit in the epilogue appended to iii23. The writer<sup>77</sup> draws attention to the significance of the phenomena to Columba's standing:

...let every attentive reader observe...how frequent was the *brightness of divine light* that shone about him, while he still lived in the mortal flesh. And even after the departure...this same *heavenly brightness*...does not cease, down to the present day, to appear at the place where his holy bones repose; as is established through being revealed to certain [unnamed] elect persons. iii23.135a-b.

The brightness is not visible to all comers, only to those who, like Moses, Peter, James, John and Paul, responded to their call to holy life. It is a light which Patrick looked forward to:

in that day we shall rise in the sun's brilliant light (*cláritáte sólis*), that is, in the glory of Christ Jesus our redeemer (*Conf.* 59).

Again the presence of this motif early in the Columban tradition is shown in the poem *Adiutor Laborantium*, tentatively identified as one Columba's own composition (C&M(1995)69-70. Reflecting James 1.17, lines 12 and 13 read:

|                               |                            |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Lumen et pater luminum</i> | light and father of lights |
| <i>Magna luce lucentium</i>   | shining with great light   |

*i. Sign of the paraclete*

This sign is seen at the beginning, at the point of peregrination, and at the end of Columba's life:

(a) Two luminary accounts relate to the pre-peregrinatory Columba; the first is annunciatory:

One night, this blessed boy's foster-father ...found his whole house *illuminated with clear light*; for he saw a *ball of fire* standing above the face of the sleeping child. Seeing this, he began at once to tremble; and marvelling greatly bowed his face to the ground, and understood that the *grace of the Holy Spirit* had been poured from heaven upon his foster-son. iii2

Trembling and bowing in the manifest presence of God and in reverence toward the boy, Cruithnechán reacts in accord with biblical tradition. Trembling is scripturally most often associated with the eschatological coming of God, thus here we have a further example of the realisation of the kingdom. We clearly see the content of Adomnán's imagery, as the light is said to demonstrate the pouring of 'the grace of Holy Spirit' on the boy.<sup>78</sup> All of the marvellous phenomena surrounding Columba

<sup>77</sup> The writer may be alluding to himself as an observer of this light, using a Johannine construction which is unlike Adomnán's more direct style elsewhere: c.f. i1, 49, ii45, iii23 (see Reeves 224-5 note b) where he employs the first person.

<sup>78</sup> and see iii18 in the next chapter. J.D.G. Dunn sees Lk. 1.35 as an allusion to the shekinah, implying the manifestation of divine glory in Jesus (*NIDNTT* 697). Adomnán seems here to adopt such an allusion, making its implication physically manifest in connection with the



have the same source; here, the presence of the divine Spirit is manifested more directly as the glory of God seen as *clara lux*, clear light, and as *globum igneum*, a ball of fire, which the title describes as *radius luminosus*, a ray of light. These last are non-biblical images, though they occur in other hagiographies,<sup>79</sup> and are intended as theophanic.

(b) Later in Columba's career, at the excommunication trial before he leaves for the desert, he is protected by an image from the Exodus (the emphasis is mine, to highlight particular features):

"I have seen a *pillar*", Brénden said, "*fiery and very bright* going before that man of God...therefore I dare not humiliate this man, whom I see to have been predestined by God to be a leader of nations into life." (iii3)

The same image occurs later as a sign of the connection through Columba between the heavenly and earthly realms:

Saint Brénden mocu Alti saw (as he afterwards told Comgell and Cainnech) a kind of *fiery ball, radiant and very bright, that continued to glow* from the head of Saint Columba as he stood before the altar and consecrated the sacred oblation, and to *rise upwards like a column*, until those holiest ministries were complete. (iii17)

These two references to pillars of light form further typological devices,<sup>80</sup> and again are concerned to show the saint as the bringer of people into the promised land of the eschatological kingdom, as Moses brought his people into Israel accompanied by the pillar of fire, and as Jesus brought the presence of the eschatological kingdom manifested as the bright light of the transfiguration.

#### ii. Signs of the grace of the Holy Spirit

At another time when the holy man was living in the island of Hinba, the *grace of the Holy Spirit* was poured out upon him abundantly and in incomparable manner, and continued marvellously for the space of three days, so that for three days and as many nights, remaining within a house barred, and filled with *heavenly light*, he allowed no one to go to him, and he neither ate nor drank. From that house *beams of immeasurable brightness* were visible in the night, escaping through chinks of the door-leaves, and through the key-holes. And *spiritual songs, unheard before*, were heard being sung by him. Moreover, as he afterwards admitted in the presence of a very few men, he saw, *openly revealed, many of the secret things* that have been hidden since the

---

messiah's representative in Ireland.

79 see Reeves(1857) 192 note d, SS Declan & Mochaomhoc, & 222 note h, St Martin, share similar phenomena. And see Plummer(1910) cxxxv-cxxxviii.

80 both associated with Bréndans, though the first is he of Birr, the second is the Navigator of Clonfert. (see Sharpe nn.131, 354. The device is also shared by other saints.)

world began. Also everything that in the sacred *scripture is dark and most difficult became plain*, and was shown more clearly than the day to the eyes of his purest heart. (iii18)

One winter night, ... Virgno, fired with the love of God, entered the church alone for the sake of prayer, while others slept... Columba entered the same sacred building; and along with him there entered a *golden light* descending from highest heaven and wholly filling the inside of the church. Also the enclosed space of the exedra, in which Virgno tried to conceal himself as well as he could, was filled with the brightness of *that heavenly light*, which streamed through the partly-open inner door...not without some effect of terror. And just as none can look can look with direct and undazzled eyes upon the summer midday sun, so also Virgno, who saw that *heavenly brightness*, could not at all endure it, because the *brilliant and incomparable radiance* greatly dazzled his sight. When he saw this *flashing and terrifying effulgence*, that brother was so greatly overcome by fear that no strength remained in him. (iii19)

On another night... Colcu...chanced to come to the door of the church, while others slept, and standing there prayed for some time. And then he saw that the whole church was suddenly filled with *heavenly light*. Quicker than speech, this *flash of light* vanished from his eyes. He did not know that Saint Columba was at the same hour praying within the church, and after this sudden *apparition of light* he was much afraid...On the following day, the saint summoned him, and sharply reproved him, saying: "Henceforth take great care, my son, not to attempt like a spy to observe *heavenly light* that has not been granted you, for it will flee from you... (iii20)

Both Virgno and Colcu are charged not to divulge their experience during Columba's life, conventionally interpreted as a comment on saintly humility, but if we grant seventh century belief in the reality of the phenomenon, a wise precaution, given the danger unauthorised viewing of the glory of God brings. As it was, the two here described were filled with awe-full fear/terror; Virgno was frozen to the spot. (cf:

And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. (1 Kings 8:10-11).

Its 'golden light (*aurea lux*)' (iii19)<sup>81</sup>, 'immeasurable brightness' and 'brilliant and incomparable radiance' could last three days, or flash for an instant; it was stopped by physical barriers. Whilst bathed in the light, Columba fasted, sang spiritual songs

81 The colour of the shekinah here should be noted. I can only find this description occurring before Adomnán in a paschal hymn Migne uncertainly attributed to St Ambrose 'Aurora lucis rutilat' (PL 17.1203).

unheard of before;<sup>82</sup> had secrets from since the world began revealed and difficult scriptural exegesis revealed. Given the identification of scripture as the word of God in Iona, this last is reminiscent of the Psalmist: '*declaratio sermonum tuorum inluminat...*The disclosing of your words gives light...' (Ps. 118/9:130), interpreted by Adomnán literalistically. The benefits of thus bathing are evidently conditions which will pertain in the eschaton, thus further realisation is in view.

For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. (1 Corinthians 13:9-10).

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ... And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Rev. 22:1-5).

### iii. The Light of angels

The story of Columba's passing provides a tripartite witness to a final description of a manifestation of light, associated with angels, (iii23: 129b, 131ab, 132b, 135a.):

...at midnight, [Columba]...went to the church...in advance of the others...In that moment, Diormit, the attendant, saw from a distance the whole church filled inside with *angelic light* about the saint. As Diormit approached the doorway, the light that he had seen quickly faded. A few more of the brothers also had seen it, when they too were a little way off. iii23.129b

A group of three stories from Columba's death further illuminate Adomnán's conceptual understanding of what he's reporting: In the monastery called *Cluain Finchoil*,<sup>83</sup> a holy old man named Luguid had a vision which Adomnán says he 'not only found ... set down in writing' but also heard from elders who had themselves heard it from the one to whom Luguid had described it, Virgno, an anchorite of Hinba. It is described thus:

...in the hour of [Columba's] blessed departure I saw *in the Spirit* the whole island of Io (where I have never come in the body) lit up with the *brightness of angels*; and all the spaces of the air, as far as the ethereal skies, *illuminated by the shining of those angels*, who, sent from heaven, had come down without number, to bear aloft his holy soul... iii23.131a-b.

(The tale is paralleled by an earlier one of Brendan's departure:

For in this past night I have seen the sky suddenly opened, and companies of angels coming down to meet the soul of Saint Brénden. Their *shining and incomparable brightness* in that hour *lit up the whole circle of the world*. iii11)

<sup>82</sup> see chapter 4 below.

<sup>83</sup> unlocated, see Sharpe(1995) n.414.

A third vision of the same event was described directly to the youthful Adomnán himself by Ernéne, an old soldier of Christ. It is interesting to note that these observers apparently saw only the light of the angelic escort 'in the natural', as it were, whereas Luguid saw 'in the Spirit' a more detailed picture:

In that night...I and other men with me...[fishing in Glen Finn, Donegal]<sup>84</sup> saw the whole space of airy heaven suddenly lit up. Startled by the suddenness of this miracle, we raised our eyes and turned them to the region of the rising sun [i.e. to Iona];<sup>85</sup> and behold, there appeared what seemed like a very great pillar of fire which, rising upwards in that midnight, seemed to us to illumine the whole world like the summer sun at midday. And after the pillar pierced the sky, darkness followed, as after the setting of the sun. iii23.132a-b

These four motifs can be seen as further typological devices to illustrate the closeness of the life of Columba with that of Christ. His gestation, commission, mission, and final journey to glory are all accredited by the glorious light of the presence of the Spirit of God. The glorious kingdom is made present.

#### *iv. Kingdom Glory*

The key to understanding Adomnán's concept is given in iii21:

And craftily spying [Berchán] set his eyes opposite the holes for the keys, supposing that within [Columba's] house some heavenly vision was being manifested to the saint, as the event showed to be true. For in that hour the blessed man's lodging was filled with the *glory of heavenly brightness*; the youthful transgressor could not bear to look upon it, and immediately fled away.

Berchán is severely reproved by Columba, who tells him that he knew, by the Spirit, that he was spying, and prayed to prevent him from either falling and dying, or from having his eyes torn from their sockets. What he illicitly observes is 'the glory of heavenly brightness', the light of glory accompanying angels, a phanerosis of the divine presence as experienced pre-eminently by Moses (Ex. 33:19-23), the transfigured Christ with Abraham and Elijah, and the apostles Peter, James and John (Mt. 17 & //) and Paul (Acts 26:13), and a potentially dangerous experience. These, with the exception of Abraham, are, of course, figures with whom Adomnán wishes to identify Columba.

The Judao-Christian tradition in which Adomnán writes is firmly established. Light clothes the Lord God as a garment of majesty and honour, displaying his glory

---

<sup>84</sup> A&A(1991) n.254, p.229.

<sup>85</sup> A&A(1991) n.255, p.229.



(Ps.103/4.1-2). R.A. Stewart<sup>86</sup> states that the concept (which we see Adomnán encapsulating) 'saturates both Testaments', though the 'glory of God' is present in a special way in the eschatological temple and city (Rev 15.8 & 21.23). The Targumist and Rabbis use a post-biblical term *shekinah*, derived from the Hebrew root verb *sakan*, 'to dwell', for 'the radiance, glory or presence of God dwelling in the midst of his people... to signify God himself'. It is the 'nearest Jewish equivalent to the Holy Spirit', and a 'bridge between man's corporeality and God's transcendence'. The Hebrew concept may be important in the Irish context in view of the interest amongst Irish translators and exegetes in Hebrew meaning.<sup>87</sup> Adomnán, observing these phenomena from his Christian tradition, presents a similar view, though is more clearly equating the light and the grace of the Spirit. E.E. Ellis<sup>88</sup> describes this light as signifying in the Bible: 'God's presence and favour (Ps 27.1; Is 9.2; 2Cor 4.6)' and his holiness (1Tim 6.16; 1Jn 1.5), and in John's gospel, denotes the 'revelation of God's love in Christ (8.12; 9.5; c.f. 12.46)'. H-C. Hahn<sup>89</sup> records: 'The sphere of God's rule is characterised in the Synoptic gospels (Mt 17.5/Mk 9.5; Lk 9.34) by the use of the OT image of the bright cloud which overshadows Jesus and his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration'. Thus the concept is inextricably linked to the presence of the kingdom. S. Aalen<sup>90</sup> records that the concept of angels being endowed with glory is widespread since Ezekiel, and found in manifestations from heaven of visible light (Lk 2.9; 9.31; Acts 22.11). The Christian hope is the 'hope of glory' (Col 1.27; cf. Eph 1.18; 2Thess 2.14; 2 Tim 2.10) 'the eschatological glory will take the believers and the whole creation up into itself by a new creation or transfiguration' (Rom 8.18, 21; 1Cor 15.43; 2Cor 3.18; 4.17; Phil 3.21; Col 3.4; 1Pet 5.1, anticipated in Isa 66.19,22.)

An eschatological reference to the light of God's glory in Isaiah may provide a link into Adomnán's image of the flowering kingdom:

The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land for ever, *the shoot of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.* ...I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it. (Isaiah 60:19-22).

86 *shekinah* (NBD 1101-2).

87 see Ní Chatháin & Richter (1987) *passim*.

88 NBD 701

89 NIDNTT 3.555

90 NIDNTT 2.46-8

Hopes for the new age are plainly being realised through Columba's Spirit-empowered ministry which brings the blessings of the eschaton into realisation. These words of Isaiah would happily sit with Adomnán's Columba:

Listen to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go forth from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. (Isaiah 51:4); And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:3).<sup>91</sup>

The light in the VC is thus a sign of the presence of the soteriological kingdom, and of hope of the coming eschatological kingdom already evident in and around other parts of Adomnán's record of Iona's founder. His sanctity is seen thus to be grounded on firm biblical theological foundations.

### 8. Judgement

As we have seen, in ii33, an angel strikes Broichan, *magus* of the King of Picts, in divine response to his unyielding obstinacy. Adomnán does not say Columba prayed for this response, rather that the response was revealed to him. However, the response is mediated, uniquely in this case, by an 'angel from heaven'. Here we have a clear manifestation of the second major aspect of the coming of the kingdom not hitherto mentioned. The book of Revelation is replete with visions of angels bringing God's judgement upon the unrepentant and intransigent. The same sign of the presence of the kingdom is seen in the various manifestations of what are conventionally termed 'vengeance miracles' (from Adomnán's own description *de terrificis ultionibus* (ii25)). Columba dispenses divine justice in an outworking of Christ's promise and declaration to the apostles,

He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23).

demonstrated in Acts 5.1-11, in fulfillment of OT prophecies (e.g. Isa 11).

### D. Conclusion

Adomnán's presentation of Columba as one who brings the eschatological kingdom of God into realisation supersedes and eclipses the petty politics of earthly rulers of his day. It is difficult to imagine that, in most of these tales, Adomnán is being deliberately obscure and subtle in his imagery. Although to his monks, to whom he ostensibly writes the Life, the images may be familiar, though this cannot be certain, to the infinitely less well schooled secular authorities of the day, any very subtle reference which may be supposed to be contained in these tales would surely have

<sup>91</sup> *NIDNTT* 2.492 cited by Hahn in reference to the missionary outlook of the prophecies concerning the Messiah.

been lost and inaccessible, unless of course the tales were told by those who could elucidate the subtle connections for the ears of the secular rulers. Rather than scoring political points from one power base to another, or even claiming ecclesiastical superiority, Adomnán appears rather to be announcing the coming of ultimate rule into the area over which he presides, and making a plea for all rulers to submit to it in order that they might receive its blessings, and not, as a consequence of its rejection, be condemned. In making this claim, it might be possible to see Adomnán lifting his patron and himself out of the muddy waters of 7th century politics and into the heavenly realms. The evidence of this life clearly allows such an overarching interpretation, whereas imputing subtle power plays one ruler to another would appear, in contrast, to demand a form of superlatively sly subtlety which must be mined from the text with consummate dedication and care, looking for cat's hairs of evidence in the microscopic side strokes of this theologian's cunning pen.

Turner's analysis of the canonical understanding of the miraculous forms part of his recent contribution on the Gifts of the Spirit, and follows Fee's expository foundation, and Grudem's analysis of the prophetic, among many others.<sup>92</sup> In summary, he wants, with Richardson, to move beyond a Thomist extrinsic evidentialism, which makes the gospel miracles simply argue for the divine nature of Christ, or the godliness of a disciple, to seeing them as intrinsic eschatological revelations, where the eschaton is contained within the miracle. The miracles are a vital and inescapable / undeletable part of the message.

For Luke, as recorded in the gospel and Acts, salvation is not merely forgiveness of sins, contentment of soul, and a bright future hope; it is holistic liberation and social renewal of God's people

as outlined in Jesus' programme Isa 61.1-2 / Lk 4.18-21. [We might compare this in Adomnán's own corpus with the ethical kingdom exemplified in his Law of the Innocents]

To this programme, deliverance from evil powers and healing of the sick are not merely extrinsic factors, they are themselves very much part of the salvation announced... They are concrete expressions of the message. (249)

John builds on the theological stance that 'the miracles are expected to invite towards faith because they embody the kingdom of God that is preached.' But how? It is not a crude extrinsic proof; Jesus refuses the attention of those who believe merely because of the miracles (Jn 2.23, 24; 3.2; 6.14-15). In Adomnán, as a result of his lack of chronological structure, there is no sense of building eschatological presence,

---

<sup>92</sup> e.g. Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1993) c.3.

i.e. it is not evolutionary /progressing towards an ultimate age of achievement. However, I believe that from the above collection of cross-references to biblical imagery and principles, the awareness in Adomnán of the realising kingdom in the ministry of his patron is evident.

It is not, perhaps, insignificant that Adomnán's summary term for Columba's miracles is *virtutes*. (ii). Adomnán is claiming here that the life of their blessed patron was spent in establishing the kingdom of God not so much in words (and he includes very little of Columba's preaching), but in power. In this he follows Athanasius, Gregory and Sulpicius very closely. The coming into being of the product of faith, is, for Adomnán, a kingdom of followers of Christ who experience the blessings of his kingdom in the present age as they anticipate the future fulfilment. This important clue to Adomnán's thinking links closely to the commentary he provides at the end of ii32 where he likens Columba to the apostles and prophets, specifically naming Peter, John and Paul, the three apostles most associated in the New Testament with miraculous confirmatory signs of the inbreaking of the kingdom. Adomnán's accounts are not so much showing us a church in charismatically accompanied activity, as in the Pauline epistles, as the church in the act of (gradually?) establishing a kingdom wherein rules the authority of the God of Elijah and Elisha, Father of Christ, the God of the Apostles and prophets. And this kingdom was being established in Dalriada, Pictland and the territories of the Uí Néill, Cruithne, Dal Riata, Connacht, and Briton alike. (It remains curious that Adomnán makes no reference to Northumbria).

Adomnán explicitly records great concern for the eschatological destination of the soul, and of souls across the geographical area for which he is responsible as abbot of Iona, as shown in many of the visions of book III. If we may take Abbot Adomnán at his word, the monks who had requested the recording of Columba's life were living at a period when the political fortunes of their church were on the wane, at a time when the missions of Lindisfarne and possibly Armagh were claiming to be more effective. In the face of this putative loss of confidence, it could be that the monks were wanting assurance of the Godly foundation of their own mission; to ask the question as to why their founder had been so successful in his establishment of the mission. Adomnán's answer is to record this set of foundation-stories, as if to say, 'This is how Columba worked. This is why he was so successful. Let us emulate him, seeking God's supernatural power for the task of continuing the establishment of his kingdom.'



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **The Indwelling Outworking Eschatological Spirit**

(Pneumatological Nature and Function)

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power...  
he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil,  
because God was with him.<sup>1</sup>

#### *A. Manifestations of the eschatological Spirit*

In his first preface, as we have seen, Adomnán gives us a clear image of his conception of the kingdom of God as consisting in the flowering of faith. With the analysis of the evidence amassed in the body of his writing, we have seen how his concept of the kingdom is woven into the fabric of his presentation of the life and ministry of his hero Columba. In this chapter, I wish to proceed by applying the category of the coming eschatological kingdom to an analysis of the understanding of Adomnán as to the nature of the marvellous phenomena he describes. He sees their function as showing the coming of the kingdom in Columba's work. Are we able to probe still deeper into the descriptions he gives, taken with the influences upon him that we have identified, so as to identify at least some of his conception of the nature of the phenomena he uses with such striking effect?

Operating with this eschatologically oriented understanding, established in chapter three, Adomnán seeks to portray his hero's ministry. His organisation of the life into the three books of types of marvellous phenomena is unique in extant writings to his period. He has at his disposal, we assume, a set of various tales of this life with which to build his case. His formulaic insistence on the availability of a wide number of tales does not help us to know how finite his sources actually were, nor the extent to which his own imagination, that of the compilers of his sources, and that of his informants, was involved in furnishing the tales he uses. The important point here is that the record he leaves has been fashioned by the thought processes of the era, and he pays unique attention to organising the tales he does use. Picard(1985) argues that the progression of the three books towards higher forms of the marvellous presents a sequential argument, in the style of a grammarian, for Columba's nature as a man of God: First he is depicted in the superior prophetic / contemplative tradition. Then his miracle working ability emulates Christ and the apostles. Finally, the divine origin of his power as a soldier of Christ is confirmed by his accompaniment by angels and

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts 10.38, spoken by Peter called bar-Jonah in Jn 1.42; 21.15-17. The significance of this name may not have been missed by Adomnán as we shall see.

heavenly light, which also shows him to be part of the heavenly world (76-7). Picard describes the prophetic 'words' as inferior to thaumaturgical 'acts' (76), apparently mirroring Adomnán's use of 1Cor. 4.20 (see above). However, Adomnán himself evidently regarded Columba's prophetic ministry not simply as words, but as a flowering of faith, i.e. acts of dynamic power energised by God through faith.

Picard sees a classically trained Adomnán following the biographical tradition of Plutarch and Suetonius (79). Plutarch 'dismissed the value of deeds', dwelling on "the signs of man's soul", in order to immortalize the virtues of the hero. They wrote to encourage emulation. In the tradition of Aristotle, they saw a man's disposition, his *ἦθος*, given at birth, as determining his life. Thus the life was presented as a response of *ἦθος* to circumstance (69-70). Adomnán does dwell on the signs of Columba's soul, as it were, but sees these being manifested by acts empowered by faith in God, not initial disposition. Thus for him act is the vital sign, but it is not unaided human act. Picard's caricature of the Judeo-Christian tradition being 'a progression towards God, allowing for possible mutations of the personality' (79) does not account for the role of the Spirit in Christian tradition in the death of the old self, and the re-birth and spiritual empowerment of the new (cf. John 3, Rom. 8 etc.). Though Columba may have been called before birth, and maintained a pure heart, his 'heroic' sanctity, and his holy nature is dependent on the transforming empowerment of the *Spiritus Sanctus*, as we will see.<sup>2</sup> In this, Adomnán follows the model of his exemplar Gregory, who, as Hillgarth notices, sees the 'men of God' as 'full of the Spirit of Christ'. 'In this they represented the New Age'.<sup>3</sup> The static character of saintliness may determine hagiographical representation, but the growing repute of an individual identifies one who fits the character.

What Adomnán does not do is to set out in any detectable manner to present a sequential argument for the nature of the marvellous. I wish to proceed to use the eschatological category identified above in elucidating Adomnán's concept of the nature of the marvellous, specifically of the prophetic, the major category of marvellous phenomenon to which Adomnán gives attention. In this way, I aim to consolidate and corroborate my eschatological interpretation by testing its application to a category of the marvellous which we have yet to investigate.

The kingdom of God is seen by Adomnán to flower in three distinct ways: firstly it

2 Picard's note of the correspondence of saintly with Irish secular heroism (79) should be seen in the light of the discussion in chapter two above.

3 Hillgarth(1987)325, citing Gregory, *Dial.*, II, 8, 9 and III, 38, 3.

flowers in prophetic revelations; secondly in miracles of power; and thirdly in visions of heavenly light and of angels. Columba is the focus around whom this blossoming occurs, but, as we shall see, he is not its only locus. An important key to this three fold classification might be found in the prophet Joel, repeated by Peter in his address on the day of Pentecost:

And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;  
yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
[and they shall prophesy.]  
And I will show wonders in the heaven above  
[and signs] on the earth beneath,  
blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke ( Acts 2.17-19 cf. Joel 2:28-30).<sup>4</sup>

The writer of Acts records the emphasising addition of 'they will prophesy' accompanying the outpouring of the Spirit, and the classification of earthbound wonders as 'signs'. Awareness of the Joeline promise is not uncommon in Latin Christian authors before Adomnán.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most interesting occurrence is that in the *Confession* of Patrick, §40, where he defends his part in the mission of the church to make disciples. He explicitly quotes the evangelists' anticipation of the consummation which will follow preaching to the ends of the earth, thus demonstrating his awareness of the eschatological orientation of this mission. He cites Joel's prophecy from Acts to v.18, then shows how signs of the outpouring include turning from idol worship, calls to celibacy, divine words delivered by angels, and steadfast faith despite persecution (41-2). He summarises with a refusal to deny these signs and wonders (*signa et mirabilia*) which God showed him (45). This citation clearly demonstrates the awareness of two significant categories to our investigation: first, the eschatological promise of the outpouring of the Spirit being realised in 5th century Ireland, as manifested here in 'signs and wonders'; second, the recognition of the imminence of the eschatological consummation which will follow preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth.<sup>6</sup> Patrick is explicit in his ascription to the Spirit the

4 additions in Acts are shown in [square brackets].

5 Standard works on the treatment of the Holy Spirit in the Patristic and Medieval eras are H.B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (MacMillan, London 1912) and H. Watkin-Jones, *The Holy Spirit in the Medieval Church* (London, 1922). A more recent summary is provided by William G. Rusch 'The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Patristic and Medieval Church' in: *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church*, ed. Paul D. Opsahl (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1978), 66-98. These works, as those upon which they report, major on the doctrinal questions of the Spirit's person and origin, rather than His manifestation.

6 A third observation here is Patrick's refusal to deny the signs and wonders ministered to him by

source of power for this mission (11), and claims to have had seven (prophetic) visions.<sup>7</sup>

The citations of the Joeline eschatological promise of the Spirit, especially in Patrick, and non-insular works Adomnán is likely to have known,<sup>8</sup> show the likelihood of his own awareness of the promise, even if he himself does not quote it. It may well be that he uses the categories of manifestations in the Joel/Peter promise in shaping his own three categories of 'proof'. Adomnán's three categories cohere. Peter reminds his hearers of the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit resulting in prophesy and visions, wonders and signs, and fire. Adomnán's major categories of the marvellous are prophecy, miracles (i.e. signs and wonders) and visions of angels and heavenly light including fire. The conceptual link is clear, as we will see below, between the outpouring of the Spirit and the accompanying manifestations, all, as we have seen, linked with the coming new creation. Adomnán's groupings are not exclusive or identical, in that prophecy occurs throughout the VC; wonderful appearances of angels are called visions (iii intro). He does not try to force the manifestations of the Spirit into discrete categories where a combination are recorded. Events during and after Pentecost, when Peter reminded observers of strange manifestations of the prophecy, showed that the new age had dawned. Subsequent chapters of Acts, and the remainder of the NT record the continued outpouring of the same Spirit manifested in various ways, including prophecy, healing, demonic expulsion, dreams and visions etc.<sup>9</sup> Joel's prophecy is interpreted in Peter's speech as emphasising the role of the prophetic in the age of the outpoured Spirit, in that he repeats the formula. In the primary and pervading place Adomnán gives to the prophetic in the VC, we see a parallel emphasis in understanding the role of prophecy in the realisation of the eschaton through the life of the holy man of God.

What then is the place Adomnán gives to the operation of the third person of the Trinity in relation to his view of the coming of the Kingdom in Columba's life, and what place prophesy. New Testament documents clearly link the present reception of the Spirit with the eschatological life of believers, as Peter explains using the Prophetic promise. Paul sees the same link:

---

God (*Conf.* 45). This denial is recognised as a sign of opposition, perhaps from disapproving British ecclesiastical authority. It might also indicate resistance to the acceptance of marvellous phenomena from those who laugh and insult his intellience in claiming such, a resistance Adomnán is concerend to counter. (see chapter one).

<sup>7</sup> see Howlett(1994)111-113.

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Jerome, *Ezek* XI; Augustine *Civ. Dei* XVIII xxx.

<sup>9</sup> see Gordon Fee (1994) *God's Empowering Presence* ; Max Turner (1996) *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts Then and Now* for recent treatments of the topic.



We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons (Romans 8:23).

He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2Corinthians 1:22 //5.5).

...those who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age...(Hebrews 6:5).

(and see Rom 8.1-17; Eph 1.13, 4.30). Having the Spirit now is thus a first fruit of the new creation, 'the Spirit is the first fruit of the full harvest', as we have already observed (96 above).

Sherry(72) notes that New Testament writers felt that Christ was 'still amongst them through the presence of the Holy Spirit, because his personality seemed to be manifested in this presence.' He quotes E.J. Tinsley:<sup>10</sup>

St Paul is most aware... of a life and an activity which is working in and through him moulding him into the shape of the vision of the image of God which he has seen. This life and activity was the action of the Spirit bringing about the birth of Christ in the Christian, and sustaining the growth of Christ in the believer to maturity. In the Christian *imitatio Christi* the Lord Christ is at one and the same time the object of the *mimesis* and, through the Spirit, the means of it.

In their lament at the lack of explicit reference to the third person of the Trinity in Altus Prosator, Clancy and Márkus record a discourse worth repeating in full in the present context:

the church teaches that Christians can already begin to share the life of God, here and now, through the gift of the Spirit. Rather than simply obeying in the present world in order to receive their eternal reward in the next, they are, so to speak, already citizens of the kingdom of heaven, members of the Body of Christ, by virtue of this Holy Spirit which is poured into their hearts (C&M 67-8).

It is not clear whether this excursus sees the activity of the Spirit as implicit in the Altus, though they do confirm that it is not explicit. However, what the *Altus* may contain implicitly of this Spirit mediated life of the kingdom, *VC* may contain explicitly. If this is true of the New Testament writers, and of what 'the church teaches', how far is it also true of Adomnán? He presents Columba as one reflecting the ministry of not only of the prophets and apostles but of Christ himself. Did his pneumatology include such notions of the Spirit as the means by whom Christians

---

10 E.J. Tinsley *The Imitation of God in Christ* (London 1960)165.

became imitators of Christ not merely by behavioural emulation of truth communicated by the Spirit, but by dynamic transformation actually wrought by the effectual presence of the Spirit? Adomnán stresses the fellow-ship of Columba not just with the apostles, who experienced Pentecost, but also with the Old Testament prophets. Illustrating the fifth century continental view on this, Leo the Great has this to say:

when on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled the disciples of the Lord, it was not so much the beginning of a gift as it was the completion of one already bountifully possessed: because the patriarchs, the prophets, the priests, and all the holy men who preceded them were already quickened by the life of the same Spirit... although they did not possess his gifts to the same degree.<sup>11</sup>

I wish to proceed to examine Adomnán's view with a more detailed analysis of the ways he describes the Spirit as working in the life of Columba, with special reference to the prophetic, Adomnán's major category of the marvellous. I will seek to trace the background to his interpretations of the traditions he records, and will thus probe more deeply into the question of if, and how, Adomnán reflects the Christian tradition of the activity of the eschatological, kingdom inaugurating Spirit. The question we are seeking to answer is, does Adomnán see the Kingdom coming in Columba's activity. The question which then derives from the evidence we will examine takes us into controversial territory, namely, can this coming properly be described as 'mission' in the Christian sense. The reasons for this last question being identified at this stage will, I hope, be becoming apparent as we proceed.

#### *B. Spirit in the Life of Columba*

Adomnán shows himself to be Trinitarian in his theology, in accordance with the doctrine of his day. He recognises the place of the Spirit in the Trinity (ii32, iii23:134b). The Spirit of God is third person of the Trinity, and not an impersonal supernatural power or force. He has silently adopted the Trinitarian description of The Spirit as God. However, his pneumatology is focussed not ontologically, but on the manifest activity of the Spirit. He uses the terms 'Spirit', 'Lord', 'Christ' interchangeably to describe the manifest intervention of God in his own contemporary world, and in that which he describes for Columba. I am here limiting myself to an examination of the references made explicitly to 'S/spirit'.<sup>12</sup> The Spirit acted in and through Columba to produce manifestations that, for Adomnán, had their explanation in the dynamic presence of God working in and through the life of the holy one. The

<sup>11</sup> Sermon 76, ch.3 (PL liv:405f) & see de Lubac *Church, Paradox and Mystery*, ch 4.

<sup>12</sup> I employ the convention of referring to the third person of the Trinity in upper case, and to other references to spirit in lower case. It is not always straightforward to interpret Adomnán's intent.

phenomena were super-natural. They were near-contemporary manifestations like those recorded for Jesus and the early disciples, yet they are not simply copies of the biblical examples. Significantly, he does not mention the Spirit in connection with Columba's ethical sanctification in the production of the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5.22), though running through the whole work is a refrain referring to 'the holy man', or 'his pure heart'. This ethical sanctity is, for Adomnán, the ground upon which the Spiritual manifestations flourish, and which they in their turn accredit. As we shall see, it provides a dwelling place for the Spirit in Columba himself. Adomnán's silence on this process of Spirit-empowered sanctification cannot be taken as indicating the absence of this concept in his theology, but neither will it permit us to elucidate ethical sanctification as a Spiritually empowered manifestation in Adomnán's thought.

We will consider firstly the opening description of the Spirit dwelling in Columba, and other visitations; secondly the role of the Spirit in Columba's prophetic ministry in its various nuances; thirdly the more miscellaneous references to the Spirit's activity in and through Columba.

#### *1. The Spirit in Columba:*

Columba's name refers to the Spirit (sp:2a); The descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove on Jesus is the opening reference (sp:2a), thus 'often in sacred books', says Adomnán, 'a dove is understood to signify mystically the Holy Spirit.' (sp:2b).<sup>13</sup> Columba 'offered to the Holy Spirit a dwelling in himself' (sp:2b). He was filled with the joy of the holy Spirit<sup>14</sup> (sp:5a). Citing Paul (1Cor 6.17), he records the union of Columba and the Lord as 'one spirit' as the rationale for his supernatural abilities (i1:10b). He was visited by the Spirit, whose grace was poured out on him as a child (iii2), and later 'abundantly and in an incomparable manner' (iii18). In this visitation he sang spiritual songs unheard before (iii18). He recognised the place of the Spirit in the Trinity (ii32, iii23:134b).

Adomnán opens his second preface by recording how Columba received his name:

There was a man of venerable life and blessed memory, the father and founder of monasteries, who received the same name as the prophet Jonah. For although sounding differently in the three different languages, yet what is pronounced *iona* in Hebrew, and what Greek calls *peristera*, and what in the Latin language is called *columba*, means one and the same

<sup>13</sup> sacred books would include pre-eminently the four gospels, then commentaries of Jerome, e.g. on Mtt 3.16.

<sup>14</sup> von Hügel calls the stipulation of Pope Benedict 14th that there should be a note of joy in the lives of those put forward for canonisation 'nothing short of spiritual genius' cited in Sherry(1984)34.

thing...According to the truth of the gospels, moreover, the Holy Spirit is shown to have descended upon the only-begotten son of the eternal Father in the form of that little bird that is called a dove. Hence often in sacred books a dove is understood to signify mystically the Holy Spirit.

Adomnán explicitly links his subject with the dove in which form the Spirit descended upon Christ (Mtt.3.16 // Mk 1.10 // Lk 3.22 // Jn 1.32), and reminds us that *columba* mystically signifies the Holy Spirit in sacred books. The direct association with the meaning of the name, dove, with Jonah, which is plainly Adomnán's point here, needs further elucidation. The dove as a sign of the Spirit is the primary explicit association which Adomnán records. He follows it by reference to the purity and simplicity of doves as referred to by Christ in Mtt.10.16, but the reason this feature is mentioned is not to expound on Columba's own purity, which is simply a stated given, but to establish that it is as a result of this simplicity and purity of heart that he offered the Spirit a dwelling in himself:

[Columba] with dovelike disposition offered to the Holy Spirit a dwelling in himself.

(sp)<sup>15</sup>

Thus there are two questions: why did Adomnán make the link between Columba, the prophet Jonah, and the Spirit, and how are we to understand what he means by the Holy Spirit dwelling in Columba's dove-like heart?

*a. Columba, Jonah, Dove, Spirit.*

Jonah, as Adomnán knows, means 'dove' in the Hebrew. Jonah is something of an anti-hero in scripture. He is not a shining example of one either open to the working of the Spirit generally, nor of the Spirit of Prophecy specifically. We do not know that Adomnán refers to the Jonah of the Old Testament directly; it could rather be with reference to the evangelists' references to him on the lips of Jesus that Adomnán has him in mind. From the gospels onwards, the primary sign of Jonah was of the resurrection of Christ. The sign of Jonah is seen as one of the inauguration of the Kingdom in the coming resurrection. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. He later breathed the Spirit onto his followers after the resurrection in fulfilment of the eschatological promise of Joel (above). Huyshe (lv) reminds us of the many epithets which the dove of the church attracted, including the Wise, the Meek. It is to this sense of the dove with which Columba is popularly associated. However Adomnán sees this meekness as the condition for his being filled with the Holy Spirit of prophecy, miracles and visions. While the sign allows for both applications, the VC as a whole argues unquestionably for Columba as man of the Spirit, as we will see.

15 ...*in sé columbinis moribus spiritui sancto hospitium praebuit.* (2b).



Columbanus mentions his own connection with the prophet three times in his letters: in the first, he introduces himself '*Bar-iona (vilis Columba)*' (son of Jona (poor dove)); in the fourth, he likens his possible shipwreck to that of Jonah 'who is called Columba in Hebrew' cf. Jerome:

Jonah, fairest of doves, whose shipwreck shews in a figure the passion of the Lord, recalls the world to penitence, and while he preaches to Nineveh, announces salvation to all the heathen.<sup>16</sup>

In Columbanus' third letter he says:

I am called Jonah in Hebrew, Peristera in Greek, Columba in Latin, yet so much is my birth-right in the idiom of your language, though I use the ancient Hebrew name of Jonah...<sup>17</sup>

However, he gives little away to help us to read any more than that he shared the name and the maritime adventures of the prophet, and that he was aware of the linguistic pedigree of his name. This linkage was thus known in 7th century Hiberno-Latin, but this does not answer the prominence given to the link for Columba, nor its link with the Spirit. Likewise, Isidore comments on the name:

Jonas interpretatur columba, sive dolens. (Jonas means dove, that is one weeping / sorrowing.) (Isidorus *Hisp. Etymol.* VII.viii.18)

and equates it not with Spirit, but in common with many patristic references, as a reference to sadness.

A major clue to the construction Adomnán places on the epithet is furnished by his near contemporary, Bede:

Jesus beheld him, saying, 'You are Simon son of Jonah' ...Jonah, rendered Columba in our language. You are therefore son of Jonah, you are son of the Holy Spirit. Son, that is to say, of the Spirit, who accepts in humility the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Bede's construction shows the seventh/early eighth century currency of the association of Spirit and Jonah,<sup>19</sup> but not a source for Adomnán's link. We may ask, parenthetically, if Bede has derived his association from Adomnán? Gregory may

<sup>16</sup> Ep.53.8, tr. *NPNF*, Series II, Vol. VI.

<sup>17</sup> '... quam facienti mihi Ionahe hebraice, Peristerae graece, Columbae latine, potius tantum vestrae idiomae linguae nanto, licet prisco inter hebraeo nomine...Columbanus, *Epist.*I.1; IV.8; V.16, Walker 2-3; 34-5; 54-5.

<sup>18</sup> *Intuitus autem eum Jesus, dixit: Tu es Simon filius Jona...* Jona, lingua nostra dicitur columba. Tu es ergo filius Jona, tu es filius Spiritus sancti. Filius ergo dicitur Spiritus, quia humilitatem de Spiritu sancto acceperat. (Bede *Comm. Jn* 1.42, *PL* 92.653A).

<sup>19</sup> His reference to the 'son of the Holy Spirit' is in turn prefigured by Augustine of Hippo, who writes of Jesus as 'filius Spiritus sancti' in the context of his birth of an unviolated virgin. *Serm.* CCXIV.III.6 *PL* 38 1069.

furnish a clue to understanding Adomnán's thinking here, in mentioning the sign of Jonah:

Benedict... had the same Spirit who, through the outpouring grace of our redemption, has filled the hearts of his elect servants, of whom John writes, "...Of his fullness we have all received." (Jn 1.16) For God's holy servants might have miraculous ability from the Lord, but not to bestow them upon others. Therefore it was he that gave the signs of miracles to his servants, who promised to give the sign of Jonah to his enemies (Mtt. 12.39)' (Gregory, *VB* VIII.9).<sup>20</sup>

Although Gregory again rehearses the standard meaning of the sign as pertaining to the resurrection, he associates the giver of the Spirit and the giver of the sign of Jonah. Adomnán also apparently wishes to associate his Columba not only with the name, but also with the prophet bearer of the name of the dove, Jonah, and all this in context of a discussion of Columba's association with the Spirit. He has made the etymological link, Jonah equals dove, dove equals Spirit, therefore Jonah equals Spirit. We may conclude a link extant in 7th/8th century Christian thought between the dove / columba / Jonah / Holy Spirit, and thus in emphasising Columba's link with the prophet, we see him making an epithetic link between the saint and the Spirit-bearing prophet who is a sign of salvation. Thus Columba's name marks him as a man of the Spirit, just as Jonah was a man of 'the Spirit of prophesy'. In Adomnán's terms, the Irish term *Colum Cille* might better be understood not simplistically as 'dove of the church' meaning man of peace or meekness, but 'Spirit-bearer of the church', the one who demonstrated the life and ministry of one in whom the Spirit dwells. While recognising scholarly dissent from the idea, it would accord with Adomnán's intent of association if a modification of the island name gave this location an association not only with the famous founder, but also with the Spirit who was, as we shall see, the source of the founder's ministry, and thus ultimately of his fame. Iona, the place where the dove of the Spirit of God was poured out in the Provinces, almost as a new Pentecost. This leads us to the second question.<sup>21</sup>

*b. The Spirit offered a dwelling in Columba's dove-like heart.*

Hilary describes Honoratus as 'this dwelling place of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>22</sup> The sixth-seventh century *Alphabet of Devotion* records a similar motif:

20 Benedictus... unius spiritum habuit qui per concessae redemptionis gratiam electorum corda omnium implevit. De quo Iohannes dicit: "...De plenitudine ejus nos omnes accepimus". Nam sancti Dei homines potuerunt a Domino uirtutes habere, non etiam aliis tradere. Ille autem signa uirtutis dedit subditis, qui se daturum signum Ionaē promisit inimicis ...*SC* 260.166.

21 A further element in the association with Jonah will be noted below, in chapter 5 on the Mission of Columba.

22 *Life of Honoratus*, tr. Hoare(1954)272.

In whom does the Spirit dwell?

In the one who is pure without sin

It is then that a person is a vessel of the Holy Spirit, when the virtues have come in place of the vices. It is then that desire for God grows in a person, when worldly desire withers. (C&M 207)

C&M believe the alphabet was written by Bp Colmán mac Béognae (Colmán mac Elo), a student of Columba's, and may thus give a second-hand version of Columba's own philosophy (C&M 195). How are we to understand this? Part of the answer is provided by Adomnán himself. In i1:10b, he quotes from Paul, 1 Cor 6.17:

For according to the words of Paul, "he who adheres to the Lord is one spirit."<sup>23</sup>

The verse is set in the context of Paul's argument as to who will and will not possess the kingdom of God (6.9).<sup>24</sup> He reminds his readers that the immoral and indulgent will not possess the Kingdom, and that those who are members of Christ (15) by the Spirit (11) should keep free from entanglement with the sinful. As ones bought at a price (19), they should honour God with their body (20). In verse 19, Paul reminds his readers that as those united to the Lord, their body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is in them, thus they should keep themselves pure. The concept has clear foundation in another of Paul's eschatologically oriented passages, reminding the Ephesians of their status as fellow citizens with the saints in the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles, prophets and Christ (Eph 2:19-20). He concludes the section:

in whom you also are built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

The concept is echoed in the *VC* as we have seen (above). Other scriptures which present the same image, and which may be seen to have influenced Adomnán's view include:

But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ he is not of him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of justification. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life also to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit which dwells in you. (Romans 8:9-11).

But God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us; and who seals us and gives the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

<sup>23</sup> Forbes & Sharpe translates this "He who is joined (Fowler has 'cleaveth') to the Lord is one Spirit." Gregory quotes the verse in his discussion of knowing God's secret counsel by revelation of the Spirit (VB.XVI); see below, revelation.

<sup>24</sup> We should note the nearby location of the other key verse we have been considering concerning the kingdom, 1 Cor 4.20, and see C&M on the *Altus* quoted above.

And who keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us. (1 John 3:24), cf. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. (1 John 4:13).

These biblical ideas must lie behind the comment about the home in Columba's pure heart. In quoting 6.17, Adomnán explicitly claims his patron as one such person, cleaved to the Lord in death to self, and resurrection to the new life. As a result he has the Spirit of God in him, and is one in Spirit with God. This does not make him divine, as Adomnán makes clear in his following comments regarding enlarged vision being a result of God's grace, not a new-found magical ability. It means that Columba shares in the life of the Spirit of God. In part, by grace on each occasion, as we shall see, he is able by this union to share in the supernatural attributes of the divine such as sight, power, presence, as well as ethical purity, i.e. both senses of the term 'virtue'. As such, he is living the Kingdom, inaugurated in his day. Adomnán is making sure that we appreciate that his subject is not merely a good man, a human hero energised by human altruism or human goodness, but that he was born by the Spirit of God into The Kingdom, as John described in what is a conventional understanding of the spiritual dynamics of baptism:

respondit Iesus, "Amen amen dico tibi, nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu non potest introire in regnum Dei" (Jesus replied, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless anyone will have been reborn of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God") (John 3:5).

That the concept of spiritual re-birth and indwelling of the Spirit is important in the Irish context is shown by Patrick's own words:

He has poured out abundantly among us the Holy Spirit, a gift and pledge of immortality, who makes those who believe and obey to be sons of God' (4); *propter inhabitantem Spiritum eius* (on account of his indwelling Spirit) (33); *'populi multi per me in Deum renàsceréntur'* (many people through me should be reborn to God) (38); *'de genere nostro qui ibi nati sunt nescimus número eórum* (we do not know the numbers of our family [i.e. his converts to Christ] who have been born there) (42).<sup>25</sup>

Adomnán does not mention this indwelling in connection with baptism, however, but in connection with Columba's life and ministry. Augustine has a similar idea in his *Confessions* (IX.vi), and elsewhere returns to this indwelling as the essential basis to spiritual life. He 'broke new ground' in patristic theology in 'his understanding of the Spirit as a gift and love, the sanctifying inhabitant of the just soul.'<sup>26</sup> Thus we may deduce that Adomnán is claiming such a status for his hero; he belongs to Christ, the

<sup>25</sup> *Conf.* ed. Howlett(1994).

<sup>26</sup> W.G.Rusch (1978), 81-2, citing Augustine, *Ep.*194.18, *Serm* 71, 187.16 & 267.



sign of which is the manifest presence of the Spirit shown both in his righteousness, which makes him a fit vessel of the Spirit, and more significantly for the VC, in the marvellous phenomena which surround him, manifesting the Spirit's presence. His being indwelt by the Spirit is the rationale, motivation and the power source for these manifestations. In this his pneumatology goes beyond Athanasius' Antony.<sup>27</sup>

*c. Three operations of the Spirit in Columba*

*i. Joy*

A further nuance to the understanding Adomnán has of his subject's status in the Kingdom, by the Spirit, is shown by his closing statement at the end of the second preface:

he was happy in his inmost heart with the joy of the Holy Spirit (sp 5a).

As Clancy and Markus notice, the *Amra* records that for Columba, his choice [of the kingdom of God] 'A rogu ro-fer subai sámsid (poured out joy and quiet peace)',<sup>28</sup> thus Adomnán continues the earlier tradition. Joy is an eschatological condition, a fruit of the Spirit available in this age of first fruits (Gal 5.22).<sup>29</sup>

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13.52).

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Cassian records Isaac's comment on this manifestation in a passage echoed in the VC (and see below):

because of a visit of the Holy Spirit my heart is unspeakably glad and my mind ecstatic.

Cassian *Coll.* 10.10.135

*Coll.* 1.13 emphasises joy as a product of the presence of the kingdom, as brought by the Holy Spirit.

Thus the presence of the kingdom, in the presence of the Spirit as an aspect of the flowering of faith in the reality of that presence, brings joy. The Spirit's presence is also an earnest or deposit,<sup>30</sup> securing the resurrection to eternal life promised to

<sup>27</sup> see above, chapter 3; Antony attributes the power to Christ.

<sup>28</sup> *Amra* IX, C&M 115&126. They point to the analogy with political literary ideas of just kingship, and to 'biblical teaching', which I suggest is focussed around Gal 5.22, the fruit of the Spirit.

<sup>29</sup> the term appears 'particularly where there is express mention of the eschatological fulfilment in Christ, of being in him, and of hope in him' *NIDNTT* II.357.

<sup>30</sup> (Ro 8.11; 2 Cor 1.22 quoted above). We might use a musical metaphor such as the first chord of a symphony to illustrate the need to differentiate the deposit from the thing purchased; there is likeness, and even some sense of portion (JB Lightfoot *Notes on the Epistles of Paul* (1895) 323) but the thing anticipated will be of a different order of magnitude to the first chord prefiguring it.

believers. God's ability and certainty to provide the promised eternal life to believers (Jn 3.36, 5.24, 6.40, 54) is demonstrated by his tangible donation of the life transforming Spirit in the present age, as he also promised.<sup>31</sup>

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13)

Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2Corinthians 5:5 & //)

Adomnán does not explicitly refer to this role for the Spirit in salvation, either for Columba or others. However, in recording the occurrence of marvellous attributes to both Columba himself, and to others (chapter 5) – and we will see that he believes the source of these to be the indwelling Spirit – he implicitly makes the connection between the possession of the Spirit, as demonstrated by marvellous phenomena, and the possession of eternal life, or to put it another way, membership of the Kingdom. That he records the phenomena for those other than Columba himself must argue for his belief in a link between salvation and the reception of the marvellously active Spirit in the believer.

#### *ii. Light*

Columba was visited by the Spirit, whose grace was poured out from heaven on him as a child (iii2), and was manifested in visible form to his foster father as clear light shining from 'a ball of fire standing above the face of the sleeping child'. Here, the origin of the luminary manifestations considered in the previous chapter is traced explicitly to the activity of the Spirit, reflecting a rich biblical background, now we see including the Joeline promise, and its inaugural consummation in the manifestation of fire at Pentecost. Later in Columba's life, while living on Hinba, 'the grace of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon him abundantly and in an incomparable manner and continued marvellously for the space of three days' (iii18). This visitation is manifested again by heavenly light, but also this time 'spiritual songs, unheard before,

---

31 Sherry(1984) 56 takes this argument further in arguing for the necessity of the continuous presence of saints who demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit's transforming presence (which he explicitly identifies as change beyond natural causation, and allows appeals to miracles which we may take to include the gifts of the Spirit) in order to give perpetual earnestness of God's faithfulness to the promise of eternal life. If saints, having once been present in post-first century history, ceased to be visible, then evidence for God's faithfulness would begin to look less maintained, and lose credence. Sherry wants to take account of saints' existence right up to modern times, and argues this as a logical corollary of God's desire to continuously demonstrate his faithfulness. He only refers to the fruit of the Spirit, but we might reasonably argue that the two expressions of the Spirit's presence belong together. Thus Sherry's account suggests further theoretical evidence for the possibility that the pneumatikoi could still be in operation in Columba's day.

were heard being sung by him', and as he later disclosed, by exegetical revelations (see below).

iii. *Spiritual songs*

*Carmina quoque quaedam spiritualia et ante inaudita decantari ab eo audiebantur* (certain spiritual songs, and which were unheard before, were heard being sung by him) iii18.

This is an intriguing phrase. We observe that the songs come as a result of the visitation of the Spirit, that they are 'spiritual', and that they have never been heard before. Their appearance is either as compositions learned elsewhere, new to the brethren, and prompted by the Spirit from memory for the occasion; or they are original songs, newly inspired by the Spirit as Columba's composition; or they are an invasively inspired voicing of the Spirit. This reference is likely to have endorsed the tradition of attributing the various so-called 'songs of Columba' to the saint's composition. The *Amra* associates him with the heavenly 'custom of music' (III.4), and depicts him going to heaven with 'two songs', [or a sad song] (VII.2, C&M 245), though this is not the output of a prolific songster. Adomnán makes it more than one song, but does not say if it is in discrete packages, or a sustained spiritual doxology. Adomnán uses the term *carmen* in i42 to refer to a composition of the poet Crónán, which he also calls *canticum*, thus for him, we can deduce the terms are interchangeable. In iii23: 131a, *carmen* refers to the singing of the heavenly angelic host. Either sense could be in mind here. The Vulgate mentions '*canticis spiritalibus*' as the third of Paul's options for thanksgiving, with psalms and hymns (Eph 5.19/Col 3.16):

be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:18-19).

Though the contexts do not insist that they are previously unheard spiritual songs, the Ephesian instruction is preceded by a command to be 'filled with the Spirit.' The Vulgate uses Adomnán's term in Job 35.10: 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs (*carmina*) in the night' clearly a similar concept to that which Adomnán describes. Turner notes one category of OT/Jewish encounter with the Spirit manifested in what he calls 'invasively inspired charismatic praise', and cites this as the closest Old Testament analogy to the phenomenon of tongues.<sup>32</sup> One category of glossolalia could be angelic (1Cor 13.1)<sup>33</sup> We might thus conjecture an example here

<sup>32</sup> Turner (1996)11, 312.

<sup>33</sup> As Turner suggests (314). For an introduction to tongues in the post-apostolic church, see: H.N.Maloney and A.A.Lovekin, *Glossolalia* (Oxford 1985); Morton Kelsey *Tongue Speaking* (Hodder & Stoughton 1968); D. Christie Murray, *Voices from the Gods: Speaking in Tongues* (London: RKP, 1978), and Ronald A.N.Kydd, *Charismata to 320 A.D.: A Study of the Overt Pneumatic Experience of the Early Church* PhD thesis, (University of St Andrews, 1973), revised

of the pneumatic practice of 'singing in tongues', in the language of angels whose company he keeps. This is a charisma which acts as a sign of the kingdom of God ( 'I will sing with my spirit' (1Cor. 14:15); 'Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers' (1Cor 14:22); Acts 2.), otherwise unmentioned in the selection Adomnán presents. With no confirmatory evidence, the conjecture is most tentative, but within the bounds of possibility

## 2. Columba and the 'Spirit of Prophecy'

a. Preamble. First, we must examine what Adomnán meant by 'prophecy' in the VC.

i. Overview.

Adomnán begins his first book (in the Schaffhausen manuscript 'A') with the phrase, '*de profeticis reuelationibus*' and concludes the first chapter, a summary of the whole work, with the report:

he began from his youthful years to be strong also in the spirit of prophecy; to foretell future events; to declare absent things to those present, because although absent in the body he was present in spirit, and able to observe what took place far away. For according to the words of Paul, "he who clings to the Lord is one spirit". (i1:10a)

Adomnán gives prominence to the prophetic not only by making it one of the three major divisions of his treatise on Columba, but also by making it first in order, and predominant in terms of number of references to the exercise of the gift compared to the rest, comprising 62.2%.<sup>34</sup> Making sense of the presentation is exercising. In book I, after two initial groups concerning major saints (i2-i6) and various kings (i7-i15) it is very difficult to discern any system to the order, though various small groups exist.<sup>35</sup> In books II and III, the occurrence of the prophetic is even less systematic, it only being recorded as it applies to, or as it arises within stories regarding the main interests of these two books. It is possible to discern recurring themes in the prophecy. It may concern the persons of other saints, kings, lay folk; regarding their sin, death, success/failure in battle. It might predict various activities such as arrival of visitors, of a storm, or of an animal; or outcomes such as glory to God or marvelling or even repentance. We may also discern significance regarding the place,

---

and published as: *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Hendrikson, Peabody MA, 1984). Interestingly, Kelsey observes that the practice of tongue speaking has remained current in the Eastern monastic tradition, a tradition often linked as an influence on the character of 'Celtic' christianity.

34 My analysis reveals 85 manifestations of predictive prophecy (35.3%), 51 of knowledge (28.5%), and 14 of spiritual sight/vision (10.4%), making 150 in all, out of a total of 241 citations of all examples of lifetime miraculous phenomena recorded. See appendix 1.

35 Chapters 17-32 largely concern minor saints; 23-25 are nature miracles with a weak prophetic element; 23-28 are linked by the introductory phrases, and concern various prophetic foresights; 33 & 34 are in Pictland; 35-6 concern the eschatological destiny of two sinners; 38-43 concern sin and obituarial predictions.



both of delivery of the revelation, and of its effectual destination.

## ii. What sort of prophecy?

As we have seen, Picard(1985) does not perceive the prominence Adomnán seems to give here to the prophetic in Columba's life. The faith of his subject is shown to flower pre-eminently in the pneumatikon of prophesy. As an apparently formulaic passage, we might pass over this as immaterial to our investigation, however, experience with the formulaic annunciatory narrative should make us more careful. The phrase Adomnán uses here, '*profetiae spiritu pollere* (strong in the spirit of prophesy)', is important. In i3, he describes the phenomenon: '*reuelante profetauit sancto spiritu* (he prophesied...by revelation of the Holy Spirit)'. He later (i.37: 37b) uses a similar term as a description of the collection: '*profetici spiritus profetationes*'. We could perhaps render this somewhat clumsily as 'prophesyings of the prophetic spirit'<sup>36</sup> As noted above, Adomnán's own overall term for this phenomenon appears to be 'prophetic revelations'. He was about to record some of the stranger manifestations (spiritual refreshment; the voice; see below), so he emphasises the source of the prophecy as being the Holy Spirit at this point to reinforce his message that Columba's gifting was not an innate 'magical' ability, but a gift from God. He uses this term at the close of book I; '*... de beati uiri profetica gratia...*' (of the blessed man's prophetic gift) (i50:52a). Reeves records the opinion of Giraldus Cambrensis that Columba was one of four Irish saints believed to have been endowed with the gift of prophecy.<sup>37</sup> Fowler notes many spurious prophesies being attributed to Columba in later times, and says he may only at first have been called 'prophet' in the sense of 'preacher.'<sup>38</sup> This divergence of interpretation in two of the foremost Columba scholars helps us to focus the study. Richard Sharpe touches the debate from

36 cf. Forbes: 'manifestations of prophetic spirit'; Huyshe: 'manifestations of prophetic spirit'; Fowler: 'utterances of the prophetic spirit'; and Sharpe: 'revelations of the spirit of prophecy'.

37 Reeves(1857) 17 note g, citing *Hib. Exp.* ii.33 & ii16, cf. *Tig.* AC587. He also records the attribution to Columba of the *Buile Coluim-cille* in *Tr.Th.* 472b, a series of ecstatic predictions of Irish sovereigns, and Kenney (220.1, lxxiii-iv, pp.439-41), includes a number of collections of prophesies of 'respectable age'. While no reliability can be assigned to these collections, they do show the repute of Columba as a prophet continuing in the developing tradition.

38 Fowler (1894)4 note 6. He refers us to Dölinger *Prophecies* (tr. Plummer). This is not the place to enter into the debate over the question of differentiating prophecy in the two senses of preaching and ecstatic utterance (for a recent assessment of the debate see Turner (1996)185-187). To summarise Turner's finding: Three main views: 1. Packer et al. see all prophecy as preaching: forthtelling God's pre-sent word to his people, applying previously revealed truth. 2. Farnell et al. see prophesy as authoritative, inspired, special revelation of God's truth, which ceased with the canon. 3. Grudem et al hold the latter in canonical prophets and apostles, but recognise a weaker concept, described first by Philo and Josephus, which can be 'as little as a flash of divinely given knowledge about a person or situation, or being given insight or discernment from God'. Turner rejects the view that NT doctrine was delivered prophetically (220), but affirms the continuation from OT times into the age of the church of the 'weaker form' of prophecy.

a different angle, writing:

[Adomnán] presents St Columba as a man whose vision was not limited by time and space, for he could see events far away or in the future. His prophecies are not like those of the Old Testament prophets but they show him as a man joined to the Lord in spirit (i1 p.112). Adomnán explains this cosmic vision (i43), citing St Paul, but has silently adapted a passage from another model, Gregory the Great's Dialogues.<sup>39</sup>

Sharpe's first sentence here is a paraphrase of Adomnán's own description of Columba's prophetic gifting (i1:10a-b). His second appears to misunderstand the range and the source of prophetic practice in the Old Testament as we shall see, and again paraphrases Adomnán, who himself uses Paul. Sharpe mentions without comment that 'Prophecy and the working of miracles are gifts of the Spirit',<sup>40</sup> these being two of Adomnán's three proofs of Columba's status as a man of God. Thus the questions we will hold as we enter the investigation are: Did Adomnán see Columba as strong in innate predictive ability (clairvoyance), or strong in the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit-who-speaks. Is it spirit or Spirit of prophesy? If the latter, was it that the Spirit strengthened his homiletic ministry, or that he revealed new truth, or that the Spirit revealed personal or situational knowledge or insight, or gave discernment. In other words, did Adomnán see Columba as a specially gifted preacher, an ecstatic canonical prophet, or as one operating in the pneumatikon of prophesy.

#### *b. Columba as preacher*

Adomnán clearly and explicitly records Columba as a preacher of the word of God to the unconverted, most directly in ii32, which refers to some days Columba and his companions spent in the Province of the Picts:

a certain layman with his whole household heard and believed the word of life through an interpreter at the preaching of the holy man; and believing, was baptized, the husband with his wife and children, and his household.'

The account suggests that a particular household responded to 'the word of life' which had been proclaimed by the holy man.<sup>41</sup>

39 Sharpe(1995)57. Sharpe (note 49) has a very useful note to Adomnán's '*quamis absens corpore praesens tamen spiritu*' (i1:10a), pointing out two similar occurrences at ii39:90b & ii42, and the Pauline source (1Cor 5.3), with the related incident of refreshment in i37.

40 Sharpe(1995)58.

41 There is a tantalising echo here of Johannine scripture: In I John 1.1-5, *verbo vitae* refers to Christ, who was declared (*adnuntio*) to the recipients of the letter. (The other occurrence in the Bible is Phil 2.16, a reference within a passage on sanctification rather than evangelisation). Believing response of households are found in Jn 4.46-53 and also Acts 11.14; 16.15, 16.31; 18.8. The context of the Johannine reference is especially interesting. Jesus is on a journey. He has just chided the official for not believing until he sees *signa et prodigia*, but following further supplication prophesies that the boy will live. The official believes what Jesus said. The boy begins his recovery at the exact hour Jesus prophesied it; as a result, the man and his household

the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Peter 1:12).

Although we can discern a temporal element here – the word was delivered prior to the conversion – Adomnán does not make the word of life ‘predict’ the response by precognition or divine revelation. We only read of the response of one family, but this does not necessarily mean others were not addressed. Given the public proclamatory sense to the term *predico*, we may also read here a preaching that was general in terms of its audience. We see that Columba employed the services of an interpreter through whom he proclaimed the word of life, and from later in the tale that he had companions with him (*suís comitibus*). We may only conjecture, but it is not unreasonable to infer that whatever their ultimate travelling objective was, Adomnán wishes to suggest that the party from Iona were taking the opportunity to preach the gospel to the people they encountered along the way. There is nothing to deny that a preaching mission was their objective here; the debate over how many journeys Columba made into Pictland cannot produce definitive answers on presently available evidence. They were sufficiently organised to find, or bring along, the interpreter, and were evidently listened to. Their message was accepted (by this family) without prior marvellous accreditation. Indeed the fact of their need for the interpreter demonstrates that here, Pentecostal gifts of preaching by pneumatic ‘simultaneous translation’ were absent. (The same need for translation is also mentioned for Skye). This is thus evidently speaking the word of God *qua* preaching (Adomnán does not call it prophecy), no doubt inspired by the Spirit, but not ecstatic, and not revelatory.

Later in the same chapter, Adomnán says Columba was ‘roused with zeal for God’, and went to the house of the new convert where a son had died:

---

believes (i.e. that Jesus is literally the ‘word of life’). Here soteriological belief *follows* Jesus’ restoration of the boy from the point of death. In VC, preaching the word of life (Christ) *and* belief come *before* the confirmation by marvellous sign, and the restoration is from death itself. It is just possible that we may here find Columba’s text(s), or at least Adomnán’s idea of the message proclaimed. Now, Adomnán’s version of the story may be interpreted as his wanting to demonstrate the superiority of Columba even over Christ (as suggested by Owen Dudley-Edwards’ comment at Scottish Univs Eccles. Hist Reading Party, Perth, 1998) i.e. Columba’s converts do not require signs and wonders to believe. However, this is to ignore the inauguratory role which Jesus plays in the establishment of the kingdom; his whole ministry was signficatory, with the cross as the transition point from the ages of the old to the new covenant. In Acts 11.14, Peter is described as having words whereby a pagan household will be saved; as he preaches, confirmatory signs of the Spirit are manifest; the result is that the Jerusalem elders recognise the granting of repentance also to the pagans; in Acts 16.13-15, Lydia heard the proclaimed word and believed; in Acts 16.31-34, a wonder is followed by preaching the word of the Lord and conversion. None of these makes the preachers superior to Christ; their preaching depended on His revelation of God, and the same may be said for Adomnán’s Columba, who does not at this point move outwith scripturally attested practice.

*Quos sanctus ualde tristificatos uidens confirmans dictis conpellat consolatoriis...*

(Seeing that they were in great grief, the saint addressed them with heartening words...)

ii32:78b

This is now a pastoral setting, with the shepherd feeding his new, and distressed flock with the word of God. They are encouraged not to doubt God's omnipotence; he is thus expounding Christian doctrine to them. No marvellous 'revelation' is communicated; Columba does not predict anything. It is not 'preaching' as addressing a large group, but it is nevertheless activity of a similar ilk.

The third example of Columba as preacher comes in the record of another explicitly evangelistic occasion, this time on the Isle of Skye:

*Qui statim verbo Dei a Sancto per interpretaem recepto credens ab eodem baptizatus est.*

(And as soon as he had, through an interpreter, received the word of God from the saint, he believed and was baptized by him.) i33

Although here a prophetic word of knowledge (see below) is involved in anticipating the arrival of the convert-to-be, once again an interpreter is employed to communicate the Word of God by unaided natural means. There is no record of anyone other than Artbranan receiving the word, though it is unlikely his two young helpers would not hear, thus we only know of a single addressee, but again, this is preaching, not 'prophesying', and again, Adomnán does not himself call it prophesy. We can thus agree with Fowler in so far as we see evidence of Columba the preacher of the word of God.

However, this does not confirm Fowler's opinion that he was *only* at first called 'prophet' in the sense of 'preacher.' The *Amra*<sup>42</sup> speaks of Columba being a teacher:

I.15 *ar ní-n forceltlaid for-canaid túatha Toí* (for we do not have the teacher who would teach the tribes of Tay)

V.2-3 *Faig feirb fithir, Gáis gluassa glé* (The teacher wove the word, By his wisdom he made glosses clear)

Clancy & Markus also see him as a preacher (120, 122), citing these descriptions of him as indicative:

I.10, *cond lath con-róeter bíu* (leader of nations who guarded the living)

VI.29 *cosc túath* (the restraint of nations)

One further reference could be seen of a description of an expository preacher/teacher. C&M (121) make the link to VC iii 19:

<sup>42</sup> I quote the interim edition of Clancy & Markus (1995) 104-115.



I.14 *ar nín-tathrith to-sluinned foccul fír* (for he does not return to us, he who would explain the true Word)

However the *Amra* also explicitly records his prophetic reputation:<sup>43</sup>

I.7 *in fáith Dé de dess Sion suidiath*. (the prophet has settled at God's right hand in Sion)

I.13 *ar ní-n fissid fris-bered omnu húain* (for we do not have the seer who used to keep fears from us)

Thus if the composition of the *Amra* within a few years after Columba's death is accepted, we see that he was *not* only at first called 'prophet / seer' in the sense of 'preacher'. Indeed, though there is evidence that he engaged in homiletic activity, the record we have suggests he was called 'prophet' and 'teacher' more explicitly than 'preacher'.<sup>44</sup>

#### c. Columba as Prophet

There is one tale in the VC which claims to have revealed new truth, iii8:

many of the secret things that have been hidden since the world began...also everything that in the sacred scriptures is dark and most difficult became plain, and was shown more clearly than the day to the eyes of his purest heart...mysteries both of past ages and of ages to come, mysteries unknown to other men; and also a number of interpretations of the sacred books.

Columba bemoans the absence of his senior associate Baithéne who therefore could not record the revelations for posterity, in a convenient device, as the revealed secrets are not revealed to us. The attempt to place Columba in the canonical role of the canonical prophet is unconvincing, and sniffs strongly of typology. However, this event bears a marked similarity to Cassian's category of illumination of the Holy Spirit who opens up the mysteries of heaven to us (*Coll.* 1.19), as described of Isaac the monk:

...because of a visit of the Holy Spirit my heart is unspeakably glad and my mind

43 C&M(120) note the *Amra* record of him as a having 'a reputation for visionary powers, especially for converse with angels', (125) saying this makes Adomnán's interest in the angelic visions 'more easy to comprehend'. The RIA Dictionary of the Irish Language (fasc.III, 154-5) gives both 'seer' and 'prophet' as possible renderings of fáith, saying it is 'used in a wide sense, both of heathen seers and druids and of prophets of scripture.' We might add '...and of early Christian Gaeldom.' Fissid has two main groups of meaning, which may further resolve: (a) learned, well-informed / seer, soothsayer, versed in druidic science, one who knows, visionary, and (b) physician. Columba is never referred to as a physician, though he is involved in healing. That he is a *fissid* may mean he is simply well educated, but the third group of possibilities as one able to 'see' or 'know' by other than ordinary sense seems most likely.

44 RIA Dictionary of the Irish Language (\*) identifies the semantic range of fissid and fáith in OI as confirming this interpretation as we move from translation to terminology.

ecstatic. Here is a great overflow of spiritual thought, thanks to a sudden illumination and to the coming of the Saviour. The holiest ideas, hitherto concealed from me, have been revealed to me. And so if I am to deserve to remain thus for much longer, I must anxiously and regularly cry 'Come to my help, O God; Lord, hurry to my rescue. Cassian *Coll.* 10.10.135

The experience also has clear scriptural precedent:

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:55-56).

[the secret plan of redemption] was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:5).

Stephen the deacon, not one of the twelve apostles, saw the secret things of heaven openly revealed by the Holy Spirit, as did the apostles John (Rev.1 etc.) and Paul (in the reference Adomnán acknowledges as prefiguring Columba's visionary experiences, 2Cor 12.1-4). Adomnán may however not be claiming here the revelation of new truth on the measure of biblical revelation; he clearly mentions the elucidation of biblical mysteries, and all the categories he records could fit into this exegetical process, a process promised of the activity of the Spirit by Christ:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-14).

Thus, though Adomnán may appear to be engaged in typological hyperbolae, he might protest that he simply shows Columba to be in receipt, like others, of the promised gift, as the *Amra* claims (see I.14, V2-3 above). Although Adomnán wants to present Columba as typologically linked with these famous groups, it is thus not clearly in the truth revealing sense. Columba does not write new law, nor show anything previously unrevealed about God (except in the sense that the Kingdom can come to Pictland, but this is fully predicted). Nor did he pronounce judgement on a national scale. In these senses he is not like the OT prophet. However, prophets in the OT did more than reveal new truth, and proclaim national judgement. They also engaged in Grudem's 'weaker form' of prophecy (note 38 above), and in this they were joined by prophets of the NT, and in Adomnán's view, by Columba.

Adomnán's phrase *profetiae spiritu* occurs as a biblical term only in the Apocalypse of John, and there not precisely:

...testimonium enim Iesu est spiritus prophetiae. (...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit

of prophecy.) Revelation 19.10:

Interpretation of this verse is complicated with a similar question to that which we have been asking of Adomnán,<sup>45</sup> so though it *may* provide a biblical source, it does not help us to determine Adomnán's usage. However, the Spirit is clearly linked to prophesy elsewhere in scripture, e.g:

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses, and took from the Spirit that was upon Moses and placed it upon the seventy elders; and when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But later they ceased (Numbers 11:25).

Then the Spirit of the LORD will come mightily upon you (*insiliet in te*: lit. leap upon you), and you shall prophesy with them and be turned into another man (1 Samuel 10:6).

on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:18).

These examples, and many more (for some of which see below) would be understood to refer to variations of ecstatic prophesy, where a revelation is conveyed by the direct intervention of the Spirit into the life of the prophet, who becomes the mouthpiece, or demonstrator of the message. This understanding is a familiar term to various of Adomnán's possible influences, e.g:

Gregory I: King Totila heard that the holy man had the spirit of prophesy,...he undertook to discover if the man of God had the spirit of prophesy.<sup>46</sup>

Gregory explores the concept further: Peter asks whether Benedict always had the spirit of prophesy when he wished or only at certain times. Gregory replies:

The spirit of prophesy does not always illuminate the minds of the prophets, because as it is written of the Holy Spirit "He breathes where he wills," (Jn. 3.8) so it is known he breathes because and when he wills.<sup>47</sup>

He illustrates from the OT stories of Nathan and Elisha (2Sam.7.3 & 2Kgs 4.27), that it is only if God reveals that they know. He continues:

Which thing Almighty God of great pity so disposes: for giving at some times the spirit of prophesy, and at other times withdrawing it, he both lifts up the prophets minds on high, and yet preserves them in humility; that by the gift of the Spirit, they may know what they are by God; and at other times, not having the Spirit of prophesy, may understand what they are of themselves.' Gregory, *V.B..XXI*.<sup>48</sup>

45 i.e. is it spirit or Spirit of prophesy?

46 'rex ...Totila sanctum uirum prophetiae habere spiritum audisset, ...an uir Dei prophetiae spiritum haberet explorare conatus est..Gregory I, *Vita Benedicti* XIII, SC 260.180.

47 Prophetiae spiritus... prophetarum mentes non semper inradiat, quia sicut de sancto Spiritu scriptum est: "Ubi uult spirat" ; ita sciendum est quia et quando uult adspirat. *VB XXI*, SC 260.200.

48 Quod omnipotens Deus ex magnae pietatis dispensatione disponit: quia dum prophetiae spiritum aliquando dat, et aliquando subtrahit, prophetantium mente et eleuat in celsitudine, et custodit in

Turner identifies the predominant understanding of the Spirit in the Jewish context of the New Testament writings as 'the Spirit of prophecy', this being the Spirit's primary, but not only manifestation in the pre-Christian era.<sup>49</sup> From the earliest NT writings onward, the same Spirit empowers those in whom he dwells with a wide range of supernatural manifestations of his presence. Thus the term has a wide precedent in the tradition. Each manifestation has an eschatological, and sometimes a soteriological reference (this last in the process of purification and drawing closer to God through understanding, see the discussion of iii.18 below). We must proceed to a study of what Adomnán says of the operation of this gift in order to elucidate his understanding of the term, and thus its significance. If the term means extraordinary homiletic prowess, then there is little to link it to the eschatological realisation we have been considering. Columba takes his place in an honourable line of distinguished Christian (and pagan) teachers / rhetors. If we see the Spirit empowered ecstatic prophet in action, what is Adomnán claiming?

Adomnán's presentation of Columba's prophetic ministry is not confined to book one, but plays an important part in the whole work. In his introductions to books II and III, Adomnán makes clear his understanding that the miracles of power he describes therein are 'often accompanied by prophetic foreknowledge' (ii) or 'the grace of prophecy' (iii), and numerous examples follow. In the summary (i.1), he explicitly differentiates two modes of the prophetic: a. foretelling future events (*uentura praedicere*); b. declaring absent things to those present (*praesentibus absentia nuntiare*). Both are described as manifestations of Columba's strength in the spirit of prophecy from the years of his 'youth' (*ab annis juvenilibus coepit etiam prophetiae spiritu pollere*).<sup>50</sup> The two modes could be seen as relating to the same phenomenon – the future may be described as being absent to those in the present, and perhaps temporally 'far away'.<sup>51</sup> However in his second phrase, Adomnán appears to have in

---

humilitate, ut et accipientes spiritum inueniant quid de Deo sint, et rursum prophetiae spiritum non habentes cognoscant quid sint de semetipsis. VB XXI, SC 260.200.

49 Max Turner (1995) 5-18 lists charismatic revelation & guidance, wisdom, invasive speech and praise as the four chief manifestations of the activity of the Spirit in ITP Judaism (6-12), and shows that the targums and rabbis recognised activity wider than prophesy, including miracles, as empowered by the Spirit. And see for example Beasley-Murray *The Book of Revelation* (London 1978) 276.

50 The formula is conventional, though we must bear in mind that Latin youth lasted until the age of 42, the age when Columba left Ireland on his mission. It is the description of the prophetic we are here interested to pursue.

51 Some at least of the predictive prophesies refer to the immediate future, thus not temporally far away; some of them refer to immediate contemporary events, thus only distant in spatial terms. There are still other tales which relate to factors immediate in both senses eg boy in Coleraine (i.50).



mind not a temporal, but a spatial displacement (*longe acta peruidere poterat*), as we shall see his presentation making clear. Thus, before we begin closer investigation, we must take note of Adomnán's keen awareness of these two modes of the functioning of the prophetic in Columba's ministry. A second feature to note is that Adomnán is presenting the phenomenon as something beyond normal, beyond even extraordinary, human ability. He implicitly infers that people cannot ordinarily foretell the future nor see remote events, and explicitly attributes Columba's so doing as resulting from his strength in the 'spirit of prophesy'. Thus as the game opens, we detect a stratagem which orients us towards the 'ecstatic' interpretation.

This phenomenon will be considered in two distinct subsections which Adomnán clearly differentiates:

- i. Foretelling future events. Columba was strong in the 'spirit of prophecy' (i1:10a): the Spirit prophesied through him (i2); he prophesied by revelation of the holy/prophetic Spirit (i3, i37). He foresaw (i41), and foreknew in the Spirit (ii42, iii23:131a).
- ii. Prophetic disclosure of absent things. Columba and others received revelations through the Spirit (i1:7b, iii8 (x2), sp:3a). Like Paul he had visions in the spirit (i43) He recognised that nothing could be hidden from the Spirit (iii21). He, and others saw (i3, ii13) in the Spirit. He, and Cainnech, heard in the Spirit (i29, ii13). He was inspired by the Spirit (iii14). By the grace of the divine Spirit, his voice was heard at 1000 paces (i37:39b).

#### *i. Prophetic Foretelling of Future Events.*

As we have seen, Adomnán refers to his collection as accounts of revelations of the *prophetic* spirit in i37, and he saw/wanted to present Columba as 'strong in the spirit of prophesy'. Here we will focus on those accounts Adomnán explicitly links to the agency of the Holy Spirit, though many other accounts of the operation of this prophetic gift are recorded in the VC.<sup>52</sup>

##### *(i) The Holy Spirit prophesies the future through Columba (i2).*

Carefully attested by Adomnán, Fintan arrives on Iona shortly after Columba's death, i.e. ca. 597, wishing to become monk to Baithéne, Columba's successor. The new abbot remembers a private conversation with his predecessor. He says to Fintan,

I cannot profane the command of the holy Columba...*through whom the holy Spirit prophesied of you (per quem spiritus sanctus de te profetauit).*

<sup>52</sup> Some type of prophetic activity, including spiritual sight /vision occurs in all but 24 chapters of books II and III; see appendix.

He explains that Columba told him privately 'speaking with prophetic voice.' Thus the Spirit spoke *through* Columba of an event which was yet to happen, –the young man's future coming to Iona– and that it was God's will and foreknowledge that it was not predestined for Fintan to be a monk himself, rather that he had been elected by God to himself be *monacorum abbas* in Leinster, where he would both pastor a flock of Christ's sheep, and be '*animarum dux ad caeleste regnum* (a leader of souls to the heavenly kingdom)'.<sup>53</sup> Adomnán's record makes it posthumously verified. The Bible provides Adomnán with explicit foundation for the idea of the Spirit speaking *through* the prophet e.g.:

...legem et verba quae misit Dominus exercituum in spiritu suo per manum prophetarum priorum...(the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through (*per manum*= through the instrument of) the former prophets.) (Zechariah 7:12).

Acts 4.25 '*Spiritu Sancto per os patris nostri David ...dixisti* (you spake by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of our father David) (Acts 4:25).' cf. Mtt 22.43.

Acts 28.25 '*...Spiritus Sanctus locutus est per Esaiam prophetam* ("The Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah the prophet" (Acts 28:25)).<sup>54</sup>

These all describe OT prophets, and show that the pedigree for this description of how Columba prophesied may also be found in earlier records than the NT, although the prophecies themselves may not, as Sharp recognises, have the same style. New Testament references tend to be to individuals prophesying 'through the Spirit'.<sup>55</sup> Excepting Acts 1.2 of Jesus, these are not apostles, nor described as prophets or leaders, but ordinary disciples of Christ through whom the Spirit speaks, a point I make here in reference to my section on the continuation of 'the gifts' after the apostles (chapter 5).

Fintan's commission is for himself as abbot to set up a mission-station in Leinster, (he would lead many souls to heaven). We need only impute backdating of Fintan's actual later position as Abbot, as Sharpe puts it,<sup>56</sup> if we reject the possibility of the prophetic *per se*, a position Adomnán would not identify with. Discounting for a moment the claim of prophetic foreknowledge, we see here a concern for the building of a non-Ionan paruchia. As abbot, Fintan would not operate under the authority of Iona.

<sup>53</sup> The meaning of this phrase will be discussed in cap. 5.

<sup>54</sup> and see Num 11.26 (of the elders); 1 Sam 10.6: 'The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy...', 10; 19.20 (of Saul and his men); Neh 9.30 'By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets.'; Ez 11.5 (of Ezekiel); Lk 1.67 (of Zechariah); Lk 2.26 (of Simeon); 2 Pet 1.21 'For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.'

<sup>55</sup> Acts 1.2 (of Jesus); 11.28 (of Agabus); Acts 21.4 (of disciples)

<sup>56</sup> Sharpe(1995)255, note 53.

Rather, it as a building of the kingdom of God. Indeed, the imperative is not to keep this important evangelist in the islands, but to commission him, with Iona's blessing and in peace (twice mentioned) to the work of mission. Commentators with a political interpretative approach may claim here an ulterior motive in Adomnán's including this tale. He connects Iona with a Leinster saint of repute, and establishes his mission upon the blessing of Iona. However, any such reading of the text does not allow us to ignore Adomnán's explicit description either of the source of the prophecy as being the Holy Spirit, nor the reported outcome which was the extension of the Kingdom.

A minor point of interest deriving from this tale is that of Baithéne's lack of prophetic knowledge of the young pilgrim's identity on his arrival. His patron frequently knew the identity of visitors to the islands. Plummer recognised (clxx n.7) that the *Amra* (by which he means the added preface) recorded that the foreknowledge of guests never left Columba:

And it was revealed to Columba that they were anear, for no company ever came to him without his knowing of it beforehand.<sup>57</sup>

and we have seen other evidence in the earliest documentary record of Columba's practice. Baithéne is depicted as again unenlightened in relation to the missing 'I' in i23. While not lacking all pneumatic virtue, viz his calming the sea and whale (i19) and his Eph 6-like defence of the monks of Mag Luinge (iii18), and while he is venerated highly as Columba's successor, with the same feast day etc., Adomnán does not know him as one who ministered in the prophetic, which is a gift he does know of others, (chapter 5). The single possible exception to this is the explanation of the marvellous fragrance, load bearing, and joy which comes upon the monks as they return from the work of the fields (another eschatological reference to the flowering of the kingdom, which brings relief (Mtt 11.28-30), and joy). However, Adomnán gives us no reason to suppose that he attributes Baithéne's knowledge to other than intercourse with Columba in the natural, in the same way we read of the prophesy regarding Fintan being communicated. There would surely be advantage to presenting the successor of the great Columba as one who also was strong in the Spirit of Prophecy, as Elisha follows Elijah, thus maintaining the divine authority of the Ionan paruchia. Adomnán does not do this, despite Baithéne's thirteen appearances, an observation which contributes to the impression that he does not easily allow his imagination to supersede his reasoned weighing of received evidence.

(ii) *Columba prophesies by revelation of the Spirit (i3, sp).*

---

<sup>57</sup> *Amra*, ed. & tr. Whitley Stokes, *RC* 20.140.

A second nuance Adomnán records of direct intervention of the Spirit revealing the future comes in i3, where Columba pronounced prophetically (*profetice profatur*) about the gift of both healthful doctrine and eloquence which God would give to Ernéne in the future. In explanation and extension to other instances, including his only explicit reference to the Easter debate, Adomnán describes this incident as having been *reuelante profetauit sancto spiritu* (by revelation of the Holy Spirit).<sup>58</sup> He records that it was from the testimony of Ernéne himself to fifth abbot Ségéne (d.652), made in the presence of Failbe who became eighth abbot (669-679), Adomnán's predecessor and interlocutor, that the words of the prophesy were learned.<sup>59</sup> In sp:3a, Adomnán uses this same construction in describing the origin of the prophetic foreknowledge of Columba's coming. Patrick's disciple Maucte is depicted as marvellously foretelling the coming of Columba by 'revelation of the Spirit'. Laying aside the question of veracity, the point to note here is that Adomnán describes the prophecies as having come by revelation of the Holy Spirit, adding confirmation to our understanding that the prophetic was seen as a pneumatic, not human activity. It may be Adomnán who interprets the prophesy as having been by revelation of God the Spirit, not the testimony itself which states this. Again, Adomnán is on clear scriptural ground as the following examples show:

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (Luke 2.26).

it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; (Ephesians 3.5).

But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2.9-10).

58 This tale also includes an example of the second type of prophecy, for which, see below, and Adomnán uses this term to refer to a revelation 'by the Lord' in iii23, one of the examples of his Trinitarian ascription of the marvellous.

59 It is conceivable that we read here of an instance in the process of Adomnán's compilation. Herbert has suggested that Ségéne recorded formal testimony which formed Cumméne's account of Columba's life (IKD 16-26). Sharpe questions the hypothesis that Ségéne necessarily produced such a vehicle for the preservation of the tradition (Sharpe(1995) 247, note 15). If Adomnán did learn the words of the prophesy from Failbe, he did so up to twenty years before the accepted date for the completion of the VC, and before he himself succeeded Failbe as abbot. This sharing may have occurred during Failbe's visit to Ireland 673-676 (A&A(1960)91), if Adomnán was late in coming to Iona, or more likely in Iona, if as Sharpe suggests he had been there since ca. 640. (Sharpe(1995)46). Adomnán was thus perhaps undertaking the task of composing the VC at that stage, with abbatial sanction, and going over extant traditions with his abbot, who, as Sharpe suggests (*op cit*) saw him as 'a trusted bearer of Columban tradition'. Failbe either provided entirely the individual tales Adomnán explicitly mentions him as doing (here and in i1], or perhaps provided the detailed narrative which Adomnán wrote down to enrich a less full written account of Ségéne/Cumméne which they were using as a source.



The latter is quoted by Gregory in his discussion of knowing the secret counsel of God. Benedict discerns a demonic affliction, and knows the future outcome should the victim seek holy orders (VB XVI). Prophecy of the future is involved. Adomnán may be reading scripture via Gregory. Knowing the secret counsel of God is a product of union with God, available to any so joined as holy men. However the almost total circumstantial differences of these tales suggest independence at this point. Adomnán has taken the concept of revelation by the Spirit out of the scriptural source, where Gregory leaves it, and employed it in his own explanation of the phenomenon. We see that the Spirit who reveals is also the Spirit who reveals the eschaton, who searches the deep things of God, who reveals to the prophets and apostles, and whose revelation the angels can only aspire to (1 Pet 1.12). All these things may be present in Adomnán's presentation of the holy man who himself also receives revelation of the Spirit. The gifting which is prophesied for Ernéne is itself an important spiritual endowment, linked both to the Spirit who will lead into truth (Jn 14.17; 15.26; 16.13), the office of teacher (Eph. 4.11), and the gifts of wisdom and discernment (1Cor. 12 etc.), all brought by the Spirit whose coming as demonstrated in these gifts is itself a sign and earnest of the coming Kingdom. Such revelations are spoken of in Paul's writings as being given as or with prophecy for the edification of the church (1Cor. 14.6, 26). Of interest here is Adomnán seeing the gift of eloquence as positive; we should contrast this with his opening statement regarding the Kingdom not consisting in exuberant eloquence. Thus we can assume that what is meant for Ernéne is not the latter, but the ability to expound doctrine in a healthful, healing manner.

(iii) *Columba foresees in the Spirit (i41).*

A third nuance of prophetic ability is recorded in i41, where Columba *in spiritu praevidens* (foresees in the spirit) the death of Erc the thief. The advanced knowledge of death is shared, among others, by Adomnán's senior biblical models, the prophets Elijah (e.g. 2Kgs 1.4) and Elisha, and by Christ himself (Jn 11.11, but cf. v.4; Jesus is only recorded predicting death when resuscitation or in his own case, resurrection will ensue). One example clearly recalls our previous discussion:

And Elisha said to him...the LORD has shown me that Ben-Hadad shall certainly die."

(2 Kings 8:10).

The Vulgate only uses *provideo* in this sense in two places, Acts 2.31 in reference to David's foresight of Christ's resurrection, and Gal.3.8 of OT foresight of salvation going to the gentiles. There are no references to foreseeing 'in the Spirit'.<sup>60</sup> Thus here we have a form that Adomnán must have derived from elsewhere. The Fathers use the

<sup>60</sup> 'in spiritu' does occur, but not in reference to foreseeing, e.g. Eph 6.18: praying in the Spirit; Col 1.8: love in the Spirit; Rev 1.10, 4.2, 17.3, 21.10: being 'in the Spirit'.

phrase of biblical characters and writers, e.g: Ambrose says of John: '*in Spiritu praevidens Apostolus*, (the Apostle foreseeing in the Spirit)';<sup>61</sup> Augustine refers to the intent of the writers of Genesis to show in the people of God the prefiguring and foretelling of the city of the eternal kingdom. This was seen '*in Spiritu praevidebantur* (foreseen, by inspiration of the Spirit)'.<sup>62</sup>

The ability to foresee the future is thus clearly linked to activity expected of prophet and Apostle. It is also a result of the eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as specified by Joel whose understanding of prophesy would clearly have included such a category. It was reiterated by Peter, who was, with the writer of the Acts, to have experience of predictive prophetic activity in the post Pentecostal days. Jerome shows his understanding of this activity of the Spirit to be by virtue of the grace of Christ, and linked to other promises of the coming kingdom (Mk 16; Jerome *Comm. Job* XL). By providing a dwelling for the Spirit of God in a pure heart, Columba is joined to the omniscient God, and thus, in a degree, shares, by grace, the ability to see beyond the normal constraints of time and space. He is living in the eternal eschatological Kingdom, and given access to its conditions, in part, by his union with the Spirit.

(iv) *He Foreknows in the Spirit* (ii42).

Closely related, in ii42 Columba '*in spiritu praecognouit* (foreknew in the spirit)' that Cormac, voyaging in search of a desert place in the ocean, would land in the Orcades. Columba sought protection for him there from Bruide, suzerain of the islands. Adomnán has the only precise instance of his phrase in *PLD*, and here we have the problem of the case of the 's'. Gregory, Isidore and Bede record instances of the Spirit being involved in human precognition.<sup>63</sup> Bede connects Simeon seeing his death, foreknowing by grace of the Spirit, seeing with the eyes of his heart the heavenly Jerusalem, coming to the spiritual temple wherein dwells God.<sup>64</sup> The Bible does not use the phrase 'precognition in the Spirit' as such, though obviously as a

61 Ambrose *De Spiritu Sancto*, I.ii.31 PL 16:712A).

62 *Civ. Dei* XV.8, and see Ambrose: *Apologia Prophetiae David* cap VII, (of foreseeing Christ in the Spirit, repeated in Isidore, below) PL14; Cassian, *Coll* XXIV.I.iii.vii (Paul was foreseeing in the Spirit) (PL49); Isidore, *Mysticorum in II Reg.* IV.2 (David seeing Christ in the Spirit) PL83.

63 In tempestae noctis cuncta sub silentio, quasi sub solis radio omnem mundum conspexit. *Ant: Benedictus Dei famulus per Spiritus sancti* indagia praecognoscens quae ventura sunt omnia. (Gregory I, *Resp & Antiph.* 'Ant. in matutinis Laudibus'. PL 78: 0794B); Maligni spiritus hoc, quod intra nos mundare cupimus, sine intermissione tentant iterum sordidare. Sancti autem eorum insidias praesago spiritu praecognoscunt, et quidquid in semetipsis terrenum sentiunt, indesinenter operibus sanctis exhauriunt, ut de intimis puri inveniantur. (Isidorus Hisp., *Sententia* III.v.21 (PL 83:0664A).

64 Bede *Comm.* Luke 2.26-27 PL 92:0344B-D

variation of prophetic foreknowledge, as Bede shows, it is not to be regarded as absent from biblical experience. The above instances of the practice as described by the near contemporaries of Adomnán show it as a familiar, if rare, description of the activity of the Holy Spirit, and most notably for our purpose from Gregory's responses, an activity referred to in contemporary holy living.

(v) *Columba is inspired by the Spirit (iii4).*

The final description of the Spirit's involvement in foretelling the future also acts as an example of seeing things distant. In iii14, Columba is said to have been '*inspiratus spiritu sancto* (inspired by the Holy Spirit)'. During a journey with *commeantes* along Loch Ness, he sees ahead, in the farmland of Airchartdan, a group of angels who have been sent from heaven to conduct the soul of a pagan thither. The Pict awaits baptism before the ascent can occur. Thus the revelation is of both the present spatially distant, and the future (slightly) temporally distant. Again, the revelation is explicitly the work of the Holy Spirit who this time *inspires* the holy man. As we have seen, Columba rushes to the scene of his vision, preaches the word of God; the pagan hears and believes (i.e. he is converted) and receives baptism. His son Virolec also hears, believes, and is baptised with his whole house. This is unmistakably evangelistic 'mission' in the pattern of the Acts of the Apostles, as inspired by, we might say directed by, the Holy Spirit. Here is a 'divine appointment' between the bearer of the good news, and one whom the Lord has prepared to receive it, an appointment intimated by the Spirit, who is also the one who brings new life to those being received into the kingdom of heaven.

We should note in concluding this section the observation that one of Adomnán's chief models refuses to regard future prediction as signifying sanctity (VA 33-4). He does not regard this ability as a sign of moral virtue. We have already established that Adomnán was not, in essence, seeking to make such a case for Columba. His sanctity was a given, out of which the possibility of the marvellous grew. Antony's strictures serve to confirm my thesis that what was important to Adomnán was to present his patron as a man living in The Coming Kingdom which was being realised by the work of the Spirit.

#### *ii. Prophetic disclosure of absent things: revelations of knowledge.*

The second division of the prophetic Adomnán discerns is what he calls the disclosure of things absent to those present. This prophetic activity did not foretell future events. Rather it revealed to the recipients events or circumstances which were occurring simultaneously, but which were not perceptible to unaided natural senses. Again, I

will consider initially only those examples of the exercise of this gift which are explicitly recorded as having involved the Holy Spirit in their functioning.

(i) *Seeing / knowing by revelation of the Spirit (i1, iii8).*

Columba received revelations of current affairs by the Spirit. In the summary of the life (i1.7b) Adomnán says of Columba seeing the final journeys of souls (portrayed in iii6,7,9-14) as: '*sancto reuelante spiritu uidebat* (he saw by revelation of the Holy Spirit)'. In iii8, the Spirit revealed to him the assault of an array of demons on his monastery ('*sicuti sancto viro per spiritum revelatum*' (110a)), and he knows by revelation of the Spirit ('*reuelante spiritu*') the outcome of their subsequent assault on Baithéne's church community on Tiree. The way in which the revelation is perceived as being given by the Spirit is thus differentiated. In the case of the emigrating souls, their journey is described as being visible, by revelation of the Spirit, to the observer. We are not told how Adomnán perceives this as having occurred, whether by vision, supernaturally aided natural sight; or in some other way. Of this, more below. This type of seeing souls is, however, one of the more frequent phenomena listed in the VC. By contrast in iii8, Columba is described as acting out of knowledge which the Spirit has revealed first of demonic intent, and later in the two day long attack, of the progress resulting from Baithéne's apposite defence, and of the reverse suffered by other monasteries without such able leadership.<sup>65</sup> It is followed by a prophecy foretelling the future. The record of both the defence of Columba and his subordinate have, once again, clear scriptural precedent, as Adomnán for once makes explicit, in Ephesians 6 (iii8). There may also be recognition in Baithéne's defence of the words of Jesus following the failure of his disciples in an encounter with a demonised boy:

This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. (Mark 9:29).

Whether we take Adomnán's account of demons seriously or not, Columba is described as knowing that his monastery was about to be attacked by a fatal disease, and that Baithéne has prevailed. This knowledge came by revelation of the Spirit while Columba was engaged in solitary prayer.<sup>66</sup> It is not this time analogous to sight (or hearing); he simply comes to know, to be aware of what he could not have come to know by his ordinary senses or intuition. This observation has important implications for understanding the phenomenon described. It has strong resonance with the gift of knowledge, 1Cor 12.8.

---

<sup>65</sup> This last point is made so briefly and with such lack of flourish that its mention as a way of denegrating the other monasteries of other paruchia, if such they were, lacks credibility. The record appears rather as a statement of reported fact, as testimony to the accuracy of Columba's prophesy, and the preparedness of Baithéne.

<sup>66</sup> Another Christological allusion. Jesus is described in the gospels as seeking lonely places to pray



(ii) *Inspiration to seek divine appointment (iii14).*

As we have seen, in iii14, walking along the banks of Loch Ness with his companions, Columba is '*subito inspiratus spiritu sancto*'. This is conventionally translated 'he was suddenly inspired by the Holy Spirit'. Adomnán uses *inspiratus* three other times in the VC: Fintan burned with desire to join Columba in pilgrimage on Iona (i2); his desire is said by Colum Crag to be inspired by God (*a deo inspiratum*). Columba is said to be divinely inspired (*diuinitus... inspiratum*) in counselling pilgrims to take the monastic vow (i32). He is inspired with manifest joyful, exultant gladness (*inspiratae laetationis*), as he observes the nature of an angel sent to retrieve the deposit of his soul (iii23:125b).<sup>67</sup> In the latter three examples, the inspiration is primarily a conventional divine influence or stimulation. While true also of the former, Adomnán's reference to the Holy Spirit, who is in biblical terms the breath of God, may permit a further nuance to the meaning of the term here, calling on its etymological foundation. It is the only such example in the VC, so must remain tentative, but we could here be seeing a reference to Columba being 'blown into' by the Spirit, in other words, to use a biblical phrase, he is at this point filled with the Spirit.<sup>68</sup> Now, no such phrase in the Vulgate uses *inspirato*, however there are clear examples of the link between God breathed inspiration and the inflowing of the Spirit, viz:

*hoc cum dixisset insuflavit et dicit eis accipite Spiritum Sanctum* (And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit...") John 20:22.

*omnis scriptura divinitus inspirata* (All scripture is God-breathed...) 2Tim. 3:16.

In Luke, Zechariah is described as being filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesying (Lk 1.67). Patristic examples include Augustine: in his discussion in *Civ Dei* XIII.24, he makes clear his understanding of such a linkage. Others include Cassian:

'Since he says this, since He asserts that nobody can show forth the fruits of the Spirit unless he has been inspired by God and has worked with God, it would surely be foolish, indeed sacrilegious, to attribute any actions of ours to our own effort rather than to the divine grace. (Cassian *Coll.* III.16, Luibheid 96).

Cassian refers more closely to the linkage of inspiration and prophesy in a comment

67 Anderson & Sharpe note the close transcript from Evagrius of the passage *sanctorum...infundit* which leads to the question containing this phrase (A&A(1991)237, Sharpe(1995)note 399. However this must not be allowed to prevent us from noticing the different contexts of the experiences so described. In VA, the gladness is a sign of heavenly angelic presence, as contrasted with demons disguised as angels, given as an aid to discernment. The soul observing them is overcome with desire for future reality. In the VC, the presence of the angels brings the discerning Antonine joy, but is focussed on Columba's anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment of his hope, as he looks forward to imminent transportation into the heavenly kingdom.

68 Ex 28.3, 31.3, 35.31; De 34.9; Mic 3.8; Lk 1.15, 41, 67; Acts 2.4, 4.8, 31, 9.17, 13.9, 52; Ro 15.13; Eph 5.18. None of these references in the Vulgate uses *inspiro*.

on the prophet Micah being willing to: '*ab inspiratione sancti Spiritus alienum* (to be excluded from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit).<sup>69</sup> Eucherius of Lyon regarded Moses and the prophets as being inspired by the Spirit, who acted as the finger of God.<sup>70</sup> Bede suggests inspiration may refer to an entering of the Spirit into a person, rather than simply mental quickening, as in his comment on the Virgin conception:

Virgo sacra inspiratione Spiritus sancti eundem Redemptorem nostrum concepisse legitur (Luc. I) (the holy Virgin being chosen to have conceived for our redemption by inspiration of the same Holy Spirit)...(Bede *Exp. Jn XII*, PL 92)

These last references refer to biblical texts and situations, though the categories used to describe the activity of the Spirit are evidently current to the writers' thinking. In the case of *Coll.* III, this activity is current to the writer's own day. Thus God's empowering presence by the inspiration of the Spirit is clearly part of the tradition which Adomnán would inherit. That the continuation of this same inspiration was expected in Adomnán's contemporary church is illustrated by the following example from the writing of Columbanus. Here Columbanus is expounding on Christ as the fountain of the water of life. Drinking will never consume him; the more that is drunk, the more thirst grows:

O Lord, Thou art Thyself that fountain ever and again to be desired, though ever and again to be imbibed' (118.38-9)... 'We pray for nothing other than Thyself to be given to us. Inspire our hearts, I beg thee, O our Jesus, with that breath of Thy Spirit... (*Inspira corda nostra, rogo, Iesu noster, illa tui Spiritus aura...*) (Columbanus, *Instr XIII*, Walker 120, 3-4).

This technical interpretation of Adomnán's possibly casual description of the involvement of the Spirit in prophetic knowledge can, without internal supporting evidence, only hint at his understanding of what he is describing being a 'filling of the Spirit', but external evidence demonstrates such an understanding as being in concord with the non-hagiographical tradition. We see the coming into Columba of the Holy Spirit, once again, this time bringing a word of knowledge to be of use in an evangelistic encounter.

(iii) *Seeing in the spirit* (i3 and ii13, & iii23.131a).

At Clonmacnoise a boy seeks to touch the hem of Columba's cloak:

But this was not concealed from the saint. For what he could not with bodily eyes observe, done behind his back, he discerned with spiritual sight (*spiritualibus perspexit*)i3.

This appears to be a very rare description, though again, Bede's description of

69 Cassian, *Coll.* IX.18; Luibheid 112.

70 Eucherius, *Instr. ad Sal.* I.i, PL50 :0780D; *Form. Spir. Intell.* I.i, PL 50 0732C.

Simeon's sight, though of the future, is resonant, and of course the incident is clearly based in the gospel story of Jesus and the haemorrhaging woman (Lk 9.43-48). Adomnán adds the detail of the mode of seeing, and makes it a result of the Spirit's presence, by revelation of whom he prophesied also many other things there (15b).

The second incident occurs in ii13 which describes the prayers of Cainnech and Columba working together to deliver the latter from marine peril.

Then saint Columba, miraculously seeing in the spirit (*in spiritu uidens*) although... far away...

Columba had prophesied that it would be Cainnech who would be the instrument of their salvation. Cainnech hears this prophesy by revelation of the Holy Spirit. Columba then sees Cainnech abandoning breaking the *eulogium*, and running with one shoe to pray for him and his companions at sea, whereupon the sea was becalmed. Adomnán makes the seeing occur in Columba's spirit, or it may be that he sees in the Spirit. Certainly the Spirit is involved in Cainnech's hearing. Prosper of Aquitaine describes David as having *in spiritu uidens*.<sup>71</sup> Augustine believed the prophets (Old and New Testament, including those mentioned in Acts 10.11 & 1 Cor 13.2) saw in the Spirit: '*Utroque autem munere prophetiae donantur hi qui et rerum imagines in spiritu vident*,'<sup>72</sup>). He deals at length with spiritual sight and visions in the final book of *De Genesi ad Litteram*, as we will see, in what may be an important influence on Adomnán.

(iv) *Hearing in the spirit* (i29, ii13).

In an analogue of another of the natural senses, Columba, and Cainnech, hear in the Spirit (i29, ii13). i29 has a series of pneumatic manifestations: Columba is on Iona. He is distressed as he sees (presumably 'in the s/Spirit') the hard labour in bad weather of his exhausted monks constructing far away Durrow. Their taskmaster Laisrán is 'impelled... kindled by an inward fire' (surely a reference to the standard metaphor of the Spirit as fire acting in this case in response to the tearful concern of his superior<sup>73</sup>) to order rest and refreshment. Columba '*in spiritu audiens* (hears in the s/Spirit)' their taskmaster Laisrán ordering a rest, in response to the activity of the Spirit convicting him of his monk's need. In ii13, as we have noted, Adomnán explicitly makes the Holy Spirit the one who reveals Columba's words to Cainnech who hears 'in the inner ear of his heart'. The Holy Spirit's activity associated with

<sup>71</sup> Prosper Aq. *Exp Ps.* CIX, PL51: 0318B.

<sup>72</sup> Aug. *Div. Quaest. ad Simpl.*, Q.1, PL40: 0130.

<sup>73</sup> Tearful concern is itself mentioned by Augustine (*Conf.*), among others, as a needful response of the saint (i.e. Christian) to ungodly action.

hearing beyond the natural occurs unequivocally in Ezek. 2.2 'And when he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me.' Less conclusively in Rev. 1.10 John says '*fui in spiritu in dominica die et audivi post me vocam*', most likely referring to John being in an ecstasy of the Holy Spirit. Ambrose writes of David hearing in the s/Spirit,<sup>74</sup> and in a passage referring to The kingdom of God, he says that the witnesses to its spiritual law cannot be heard by bodily ears, only by those who hear in the s/Spirit.<sup>75</sup> Augustine describes Peter as hearing the Spirit speak to him during the vision of the vessel (Acts 10.13) not with bodily senses but '*in spiritu*'. Augustine emphasizes that the Holy Spirit spoke within the spirit of Peter which is also the location for images formed in spiritual visions.<sup>76</sup> Thus from the NT canon onwards, being 'in the Spirit' and hearing God's revelation in the spirit are associated. Columba is not, however, hearing God, rather he hears in the s/Spirit the words spoken remotely by a human agent. Again, this finds a precursor in scripture. An early commentator sees such a process occurring between Paul and the Corinthian Christians. He comments on 1Cor. 1.11 that Paul, though absent in body, hears the Corinthians in the Spirit.<sup>77</sup> In this comment, the writer refers to Col 2.5, a further feature of Adomnán's pneumatology to which I shall refer below. He equates 'hearing in the Spirit' with 'knowing in the Spirit', a phenomenon Adomnán evidently ascribes to Columba.

(v) *Visions of the Spirit (i43).*

Adomnán asserts that in company with the apostle Paul, Columba had '*spiritualium uisionum*' (i43). The chapter containing this reference acts as a key to our interpretation of Adomnán's understanding of the whole group of phenomena involving spiritual perception. Brünig first elucidated the Gregorian influence on Adomnán at this point in clear borrowings from *Dialogues* ii.35 & iv.7.<sup>78</sup> Sharpe(1995, 57) adds that Adomnán wished to ascribe to Columba this 'rare' gift, thus bringing him silently into the contemplative tradition of Benedict. Is Grègory the sole interpreter of the tradition upon whom Adomnán builds his picture of Columba's visionary experiences? What exactly did Adomnán understand the phrases concerning

74 *Exp.Ps* XI, XXII PL15

75 Non illam audit Judaeus, qui audit corporaliter; sed ille audit, qui audit in spiritu. Habent illi libros, sed sensum librorum non habent. Habent prophetas, sed non habent quem illi prophetaverunt. (Ambrose, *Ps. Exp.*, XXI.12, PL15:1506C)

76 *De Gen. ad Litt.* 12.11.24, PL34:0563, Taylor 192. See further discussion below.

77 Jerome?, *Comm. 1 Cor 1*, PL30: 0719B.

78 Brünig(1916), p250, followed by Anderson(1991)79 note 99, and Sharpe p.57 'Adomnán explains this cosmic vision, citing St. Paul.' and note189. For an extended comment on the Gregorian borrowing, see Appendix 2. Citations from Gregory *Dial*, ed de Vogüé(1979 & 80); tr. from Gardner(1911)



spiritual perception to mean, and how did he understand the operation of this spiritual gift, if gift it is?

*Spiritualium uisionum* has been rendered variously 'visions of the Spirit (B) / spirit' (A, S), or 'spiritual visions' (F, H). The case of the 's' is again important in determining which spirit it is to which Adomnán is referring here. Is it the human spirit of Columba which sees unaided, or the Spirit of God which enables Columba to see beyond normal ability? Is he confused as to which, or does he regard both the human and divine spirits to be involved? My discussion above has argued that Adomnán's constant thrust is to insist that the marvellous phenomena in which Columba moves are not attributable to some marvellous ability he naturally possesses, but to the dynamic action of God in or through Columba's human spirit. Adomnán confirms that the source is divine in the first part of Columba's explanation of the visions:

There are some, although very few, on whom divine grace (*diuina...gratia*) has bestowed this: that clearly and most distinctly they can see even the entire orb of the earth with its surrounding of ocean and heaven at one and the same moment, as though under one ray of the sun; the inmost place of mind being marvellously enlarged.<sup>79</sup>

Thus he wishes to emphasise that the source of the vision is divine grace. Grace and the Spirit of God are linked in scripture: OT eschatological prophesy promises: 'And I will pour out ... a spirit of grace (*spiritum gratia*)' (Zec. 12:10). The Holy Spirit is called the 'Spirit of Grace (*Spiritus gratiae*)' (Heb. 10:29). There are '*divisiones vero gratiarum*' one of which is '*gratiasanctatum*', all given by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12.4, 9). If we render *gratia* here by the English 'free granting', we see that the vision of Columba is granted by the Spirit of God. For Adomnán, following Gregory, the arena of the vision is in the 'marvellously enlarged scope of the mind'. The Holy Spirit makes the vision possible in the recipient by enlarging the scope of the mind from its natural, earthly mode of operation, to one operating partially under the conditions of the eschaton.

In this, Adomnán is entirely in line with mainstream Christian tradition. He explicitly claims this in citing Paul as precedent to Columba's talking in the third person out of humility. The whole Pauline section reads:

I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven (*raptum eiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum*). Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows. And I know that this man...was caught up to Paradise (*raptus est in paradisum*). He heard

---

<sup>79</sup> VC i43, 44b-45a, my transliteration.

inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. (2Cor. 12:1b-4).

Adomnán's knowledge of this passage is an important piece of evidence to hold as we proceed. A further scriptural passage can be seen as a clear example of the same phenomenon in operation, with examples of some of Adomnán's other modes of delivery of prophetic knowledge:

Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not resort to sorcery as at other times, but turned his face towards the desert. When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came upon him and he uttered his oracle: "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly (*cuius obturatus est oculus*), the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty (*qui visionem Omnipotentis intuitus est*), who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened (*sic aperiuntur oculi eius*)..." (Num. 24.1-4).

Gregory says that for Benedict, first a light brighter than daylight shone in the dead of night, representing the presence of God, then: 'the whole world, gathered as it were together under one beam of the sun, was presented before (Benedict's) eyes' (*ante oculos eius adductus est*) (*Dial.* II.35.25-6 tr.97). Benedict sees the soul of Germanus in a fiery globe being carried up to heaven by Angels. Gregory explains that it is,

by means of that light that the capacity of the inward mind is enlarged, (*quia ipsa luce uisionis intimae mentis laxatur sinus*) and is in God so extended, that it is far above the world; yea and the soul of him that seeth in this manner, is also above itself; for being rapt up in the light of God, it is inwardly in itself enlarged above itself...the man of God...could not see those things but in the light of God... what marvel, then, is it if ...he was at that time out of the world? (*Dial.* II.35.53-64, tr.98).

Benedict saw light with his outward eyes, while 'the inward light which was in his soul ravished the mind of the beholder to supernal things, and showed him how small all earthly things were.' (*Dial.* II.35.68-71, tr.98)

In *Dial.* IV, Gregory returns to the theme following Peter's questioning the immortality of the soul. Gregory asserts that the soul's immortality and posthumous presence is demonstrated by the miracles associated with the corpses of the martyrs; the visible miracles assert the real presence of their invisible souls. He goes on:

A little before, you complained for that you could not see the soul of one when it departed out of the body; but that was your fault, who desired with corporeal eyes to behold an invisible thing, for many of us, that by sincere faith and plentiful prayer, have had the eye of our soul purified, have often seen souls going out of their bodies...examples may satisfy our wavering and doubtful minds, which reason can not so fully persuade...I told you how venerable Bennet (as by relation of his own monks I

learned) being far distant from the city of Capua, beheld the soul of Germanus... at midnight to be carried to heaven in a fiery globe. Who, seeing the soul as it was ascending up, beheld also, in the largeness of his own soul, within the compass of one sunbeam, the whole world as it were gathered together. (*Dial.* IV.7-8, tr.187).

He gives the example to aid belief, to 'satisfy our wavering and doubtful minds which reason can not so fully persuade', and infers that he has himself seen such visions. Here we must have the understanding which Adomnán adopted for the functioning and nature of the visions he describes. Comparing these passages with the VC, we see that Gregory has a much fuller explanation. Close parallels include both referring to a man of God being the recipients of the visions; both reported on the vision afterwards; both experience rapture / ecstasy; both are insistent that the envisioning is not a natural ability, but a direct intervention of God in enlarging the capacity of the mind. Gregory, like Adomnán elsewhere, is conscious of rationalistic objections to the evidence he presents; both received the story through monastic interlocutors. However there are numerous differences in circumstantial detail, as well as application. Benedict stood in the dead of night, Columba sat during the day; Benedict saw light here, followed by, or at least accompanying the vision, Columba saw only the vision on this occasion. There is no attempt at secrecy with Benedict, indeed, he calls another to witness the event. The immortal soul is the focus for Gregory, part of his proof of the existence of the invisible seen only by spiritual vision; for Adomnán, the tale functions as a vehicle for explaining Columba's experience of these visions. However, an important difference is that Adomnán links the visions specifically to the activity of the Holy Spirit. This simultaneous dependence upon and independence from Gregory should make us further question the thesis of Adomnán simply creating his life of Columba in the hagiographical gathering of good tales from elsewhere. It shows a developed pneumatological understanding of the basis of the marvellous phenomena as products of the grace of the Spirit.

However, the tradition regarding seeing in the s/Spirit is not only biblical and Benedictine. Athanasius' Antony recognises that as in Elisha (2/4 Kings 5.26) the pure soul can 'become clear sighted, to see more and farther than the demons, since it has the Lord who reveals things to it' (VA 34). Spiritual vision resulting from purity of heart is noted by Augustine in his treatise *De Genesi ad Litteram* (12.27.55).<sup>80</sup> The 12th and final book investigates this phenomenon in attempting an explanation of Paul's rapture to the third heaven. This, as we have seen, is Adomnán's text for Columba's explanation. He ranks three types of vision: the corporeal, seen with

<sup>80</sup> He also notes demonic ability to see over distance in 12.17.34. Marina Smyth (1986) has shown the influence of this treatise elsewhere in the Irish context.

bodily eyes and imagined in the human spirit; the spiritual, imagined in the human spirit; and the intellectual, a direct encounter with truth unmediated by an image of an object (cc.6-8, 11, 12, 14, 24). The last is the highest form, exemplified in Moses' face-to-face encounter with God (Num.12.27; 12.27.55). Augustine considers the apocalyptic vision of John a spiritual vision, not of the highest order (12.26.53). Importantly for us, he explicitly links the phenomenon to prophesy, again discerning three orders (9.20). The lowest class sees and communicates images in dream or ecstasies, but with no understanding (e.g. Pharaoh). The second interprets images revealed to others (e.g. Joseph). The highest order both receives the revelations, and interprets them (e.g. Daniel, Moses, Paul). In both these classifications, we can see Adomnán presenting Columba as practitioner of the highest orders, as well as the lower. He both receives revelations, and explains their meaning. In the visions of heavenly light, he sees the glory of God as did Moses (26.54), and receives hidden knowledge. Augustine also has the concept of seeing things absent (12.25). He sees the visions and dreams as fulfillment of the Joeline promise (21.44), adding weight to my suggestion above of this passage's relevance to Adomnán's explanation. He sees the visions mediated by the love of the Spirit of God through the spirit of man (12.26; 34.67), confirming the interpretation I suggest above for VC i43. He describes the phenomenon as a gift of the Spirit (13.28 & 26.54), confirming Sharpe's classification (and see chap 5 below). Finally, he interprets the vision of the third heaven as a vision of the life to be the believer's forever after this life (28.56), a vision of the heavenly kingdom which Adomnán wants to show Columba as being involved as realizing. Given Augustine's influence upon Gregory, this book thus forms the original patristic foundation of both Gregory and Adomnán's explanations, and of many of Adomnán's themes. We see Adomnán operating out of a mainstream tradition.

Cassian too refers to the seat of this phenomenon: 'everything lies at the innermost recess of the soul' and links purity here with the establishment of the Kingdom. (*Coll.* 1.13). Only the pure soul of high virtue with Peter, James and John is able to see the glorified Jesus:

with the inner gaze of the soul, it sees the glorified Jesus coming in the splendour of His majesty...to those worthy to look upon it with the clear gaze of the s/Spirit.  
(*Coll.*10.6)

The tradition concerning Columba has an early record in the Irish context: Clancy & Markus refer to the *Amra*'s note of his visionary powers, with which they include converse with angels. They take the refrain; 'our hero used to speak with the apostle' as such a visionary encounter (VI.21) (120, 125). Another interesting phrase is in



I.16: *hUile bith, ba h  e h  * (The whole world, it was his). This may be a reference to his gift of extended vision, in discussion here. Finally, we should note that Columba is not the only Irish Christian claiming such visionary experience. Patrick states explicitly that he heard and saw in dream or waking vision the Spirit praying inside his own body which he observed from a position outside himself, and he heard the Spirit praying over his inner man. (*Conf.*   24-25, and see Howlett pp.13 & 113-114). Thus although Adomn  n uses Gregory's words, the concept can be seen to be present in Ireland's earliest Christian history. While Gregory is evidently a direct influence, he is not the only source for the concept Adomn  n is discussing. This deeper tradition perhaps explains why Adomn  n includes so little of Gregory's explanation to Peter, and why he adds alternative material in its place.

Augustine's treatment of Paul's rapture, visited en route from scripture to Adomn  n by Gregory in his explanation of Benedict's gifting, is thus instructive in elucidating what this spiritual vision, or vision in the Spirit was to Adomn  n. Other tales he records without using the term 'spiritual vision', but which clearly involve supernatural perception include the three days in the Spirit where the secrets of difficult scripture were revealed to him; angelic visions; visions of souls of the deceased departing for heaven; his tears over hard working monks; the Italian volcano, etc. Adomn  n calls this envisioning '*obscurissimum sacramentum*'. Reeves notes the reference to a similar '*sacramentum*' in the *Life of Brendan*,<sup>81</sup> where it signifies a 'solemn secret or deposit'. The occurrence of the phrase 'spiritual visions' going back to Augustine and Jerome, and their attribution of the phenomena to the biblical record, show this to be a phenomenon familiar to, and integral to Christian tradition. In entering a relationship with the omniscient Creator, and in being filled with the very presence of the same, in Spirit, the sanctus, one made holy by this indwelling, is given (limited) access to the view of the creation, as it were through the eyes of the Creator. Such vision is granted by the grace of God to those whose communion with God is strengthened by the ethical lifestyles in which they live; there is less of this world to 'get in the way'. The granting of vision of creation in this way is itself a sign of the location of the person so seeing. They are above, to use Gregory and Patrick's description, ie. in the heavenly world, the kingdom of God. They observe the world from this perspective and with divinely empowered spiritual eyes that are able, with God's help, to see beyond the intellectual and physical vision of those not so gifted (and I emphasize the view held by Adomn  n that the gift is God's donation of the temporary, first fruit ability to see in this way at certain restricted times. Complete

81 (Reeves(1857) 84 note k, referring to the *Codex Kilk.* ms. cap 18, ed. now by Moran (Dublin 1872) and Grosjean *AB* 48(1930) 103-121.

heavenly perspicuity will not be available until the Kingdom is entered fully at death.) The relationship of the presence of God and light accompanying Columba's devotions is a major theme of Adomnán in the *Life*, and to which he returns in book III as we have seen, but it is the union of the spirit of the man with the Spirit of God which makes the prophetic visions possible. Columba is to be seen as one who sees from the vantage point of the eschatological kingdom.

Thus yet again we see Adomnán the hagiographer using terminology which has respectable precedent in the serious writings of the doctors of the church, describing a phenomenon associated with the activity of the Spirit of God in the holy person. Columba's place in the procession of such in Christian history is thus further confirmed.

(vi) *Nothing can be hidden from the Spirit (iii21).*

A closely related aspect of Adomnán's pneumatology is found near the close of the work, in iii21. An *alumnus* of Columba's, one Berchán Mes loen, is cautioned not to approach his master's *hospitiolum* that night, as he had apparently repeatedly done before.<sup>82</sup> He disobeys once more, and spies through a keyhole, presumably hoping that the heavenly vision he expected would lend him *sapientia*. He saw the glory of heavenly brightness (which may be the brightness accompanying the granting of vision as in Benedict, above). This divine glory however convicts the youth of his sin in wilful disobedience of the abbot's caution, and terrified, he flees. The next day, he is severely objurgated for his repeated defiance. He, being of impure heart and motive is not able to look upon the manifest glory of the presence of God without mortal danger. The saint in ecstasy (we assume) sees the sinful spy, and pleads for God's mercy, which is granted. Columba also prophesies of Berchán's future, a future which comes to pass. Here Adomnán explicitly names the source of this phenomenon that is described frequently in VC. Supernatural sight comes as a result of union with the Holy Spirit, from whom nothing can be concealed or hidden. We have examined the aspects of fear and purity in connection with heavenly light above. The point for our purpose here is that Adomnán explicitly shows us his understanding that Columba's ability to see 'things absent' and 'things future', to return to his description, is again not his natural unaided ability, but one granted by the Spirit. It is thus given to him to see, on this occasion as on other particular occasions, that which the Spirit reveals.

---

<sup>82</sup> see Anderson(1991)215 note 234.

(vii) *The marvellous voice (i37b).*

By 'the grace of the divine Spirit', Columba's voice was heard at distances up to 1000 paces (i37b:39b). Adomnán calls this a rare miracle in a report which at first sight appears to attribute to the activity of the Spirit something beyond the wide bounds of Christian tradition. This is not a loud voice; those standing next to Columba were not aware of any raised volume. However, those far away were able to hear every syllable he sang clearly. 'His voice sounded alike in the ears of those that heard it, near or far.' We have considered the miraculous voice in context of the saga *Oided mac nUisnig*. There is more to notice in our present context of considering Adomnán's pneumatology. He introduces i37 with the *divisio*, 'Among these memorable revelations of the prophetic Spirit it seems not out of place to record...' and then relates the tale of Columba's spirit bringing comfort, this of the voice, and a third regarding his voice terrifying Bruide and his people. It is an unusual triplet of incidental stories, more naturally to be thought of belonging to book II. No previous comment has been recorded as to why this collection has been recorded here, as it seems, deliberately, but showing Adomnán's recognition of their appearing out of place. Neither i36 nor i37 are given place in the contents lists of mss A or B. i37c is again strangely out of place in the first book. Columba's miraculously amplified voice, like thunder, roars in response to the prohibitions of the Druids against singing vespers outside Bridei's palace, resulting in the king and pagan people being struck with intolerable fear. No further affect is recorded. This would very naturally go with the Pictish mission accounts in ii33-5, though evidently brought here to follow the previous voice miracle. But why is *that* recorded here?

Kydd notices the reference in Ignatius' *Letter To Philadelphians* (7.1 &2) where Ignatius says he 'spoke with a loud voice', thus adopting the contextual hallmark of a prophet.<sup>83</sup> In scripture, the loud voice is often a sign that it is God's powerful voice speaking, with information gained from no man, but given by the Spirit. (e.g. Isa.5.25ff, Ez.3.12; Rev.1.10 etc.) In these linked stories from Iona and Pictland, Columba's marvellously audible voice is the voice of the prophet, produced by the grace of the Spirit, enabling the word of God to be heard and responded to by God's intended audience. In the first, the voice is not loud as such, but it is heard at a distance. In the second, the voice of God, mediated through His Word and His prophet, rings out judgment in thunderous roars (see e.g. Job 40.9.). Thus the tales are seen to be quite rightly placed in the book of prophetic revelations, even if, as Adomnán acknowledges, they are unusual. The lack of clear scriptural or ecclesiastical

<sup>83</sup> ed. Camelot 126, tr Kydd. Kydd, Thesis 151, cites Dölger in support of this view.

precedent for the actual miracles marks these prophetic tales out as perhaps indicating an ability on the writer's part not merely to ape his predecessors, but to record original phenomena, though ones which do not do violence to the concept of prophesy conveyed therein. The phenomenon described is comparable, in an inverted way, to that of spiritual sight. Here, instead of the mind of the subject being enlarged so as to encompass a marvellous viewpoint, the voice of the subject is enlarged, and others are enabled to hear it. Adomnán insists 'it could not have happened at all, without the grace of the Holy Spirit.' We may well be seeing here an example of Adomnán own creativity in bringing yet another eschatological reference. Paul's metaphor for the hope of the eschaton where believers will see clearly (1Cor 13.12) is here transferred to hearing clearly in a first-fruit experience of the Kingdom brought by the Spirit.

### *3. Actions ascribed to the spirit of Columba*

In these final references to spirit, Adomnán is unquestionably referring to the human spirit of Columba. Like Paul, Columba could be present in spirit though absent in body (i1:10a, ii39:90b, 42c), and his spirit provided spiritual refreshment (i37). Finally, Columba is described as the father, and teacher, of spiritual sons (iii23:128b), and at the last, he breathed out his spirit in death (iii23:130b) (Mtt. 27.50 & Acts 7.59). These last are commonplace descriptions which I merely note.

Adomnán has adopted a Christian anthropological idea of the existence of the human spirit which constitutes part of the human being. It is no part of this study's direct interest to investigate the anthropological relationship and or differentiation of spirit to soul, intellect or mind in the VC. Adomnán is evidently close to equating the human spirit with the animating power of the mind, as in Augustine's *De Genesi ad Litteram* 12.7.18. I am assuming a view where the action of the person's spirit is identified with the action of the person rather than an external agent. In two examples here, action is removed spatially from the fleshly location, but it is still expressly identified with the man, and not the divine. Nor can we treat soteriological questions of the regeneration of the human spirit by the inspiration of the soteriological Spirit discerned by Luke, profitable though such studies would prove. Here my interest is to introduce Adomnán's use of the category to show his awareness of both the differentiation between human and divine spirits, and the possibilities opened up by their coming into relationship.

(i) *Columba could be present in spirit though absent in body. (i1:10a, ii39:90b, ii42c:96b).*

In the summary this is presented as a rationale for his prophetic ability both to declare absent things far away to those present, and to foretell future events (as above



described), because, says Adomnán, he was able to observe what took place. Biblical precedent for this phenomenon is claimed by Adomnán explicitly in a verse we have already considered for another purpose:

For according to the words of Paul, 'he who clings to the Lord is one spirit'.

He quotes 1 Cor 6.17, the context of which is Paul's ethical discussion of life in the Kingdom; in the church; in the body of Christ. He emphasises the spiritual union with Christ which derives from being part of His body, and the consequent need to use the body towards God's glory. However, Paul does not develop his thought at this point along the line which Adomnán does. He has done so already in this letter in a section Adomnán must clearly have had in mind:

For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus... (1 Cor. 5:3-4).

he repeats the idea in another letter:

For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit (Col. 2:5).

Paul returns to a consideration of the human spirit in 1 Cor 14, where he considers this to be the organ which prays in tongues (uttering mysteries, 14.2, 16) and which can pray, praise, and sing independently from the mind (14.14, 15), all features we can recognize in Adomnán's account of Columba. (e.g. iii18, see above). Paul's earlier comment regarding the spirit may also be echoed in Adomnán's presentation:

For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him?

So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1Cor.2:11).

As one whose spirit is united with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Columba is, by grace, occasionally given glimpses into the mind of God. Thus in Christian theological terms, there is nothing unusual in Adomnán's claim. One who is joined to Christ is one Spirit, as Adomnán explicitly records; the Spirit is omnipresent, and makes himself specially 'present to bless' in particular locations of space and time.<sup>84</sup> That this belief was held in the Columban tradition is confirmed in the tales of Librán (i39:90b) and Cormac (ii42c:96b), who speak to Columba, present in the Spirit, while they themselves are distant from his physical location. The saint responds to the pleas by prayer to God, and obtains changes of wind from the Lord. This belief is clearly preparatory to the belief in speaking to deceased saints, invoking their help.

---

<sup>84</sup> See Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (1994)634 note 1.

(ii) *Columba's spirit provided spiritual refreshment (i37).*

The spirit of Columba is said to have met some of his monks on their way from hard work in the fields. Something marvellous and strange was felt by them at the same place and vesper hour each night. Baithéne called it a miracle; it was reportedly accompanied by a marvellous floral fragrance and a pleasant heat, and an inspired joyousness of heart, all of which brought miraculous revival and gladness such as to forget the hardship of labour, and to lighten any burden then being carried. All felt the same independently. Baithéne explains that it is Columba's spirit meeting them; he being unable to meet them physically. They respond by 'worshipping Christ in the holy and blessed man'. Again this idea is not unknown in scripture, though in a slightly different form:

for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men.  
(1Cor. 16:18).

Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort we rejoiced still more at the  
joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by you all. (2 Cor. 7:13).

We have ready understanding of the floral fragrance, and joyousness from our eschatological and pneumatological discussions above. Here Columba's disciples are smelling the fragrance of the flowering Kingdom. Again we note Adomnán's refusal to mix up the persons of the saint and of God in his description of their worshipping Christ *in* Columba, and not Columba himself, nor his spirit.<sup>85</sup> We could accuse Baithéne, or his commentator, of theological naivety in the explanation he is reported to have given, making the human spirit able independently to move around as it wills. Taken with all of Adomnán's understanding of the interplay of the human and divine spirits, however, this is incorrect for Adomnán, and unfair to Columba's successor.

### C. Conclusion

We are seeking an understanding of the nature and function of the marvellous phenomena in the *Life of Columa*. In chapter two, their nature as pagan survivals was dismissed, and a clear biblical pedigree identified. In chapter three, their biblical eschatological nature was identified. Their function was traced as an outworking of the biblical concept of the realisation of the conditions of the eschatological kingdom of God in the present age. In this chapter, we have applied earlier findings to a study of prophecy, the major class of phenomena which Adomnán records. His explicit linking of the operation of the gifts of prophecy with that of the eschatological Spirit has been identified, and the eschatological function of prophecy shown. The operation of the

---

<sup>85</sup> Fowler noted that fragrance is a commonplace at saints' tombs (Fowler48n4), though Columba has not yet been buried; perhaps we see a further prefiguring of the development of shrine worship in the Ionian paruchia.

prophetic gifts play a dominant part in Adomnán's presentation of the rôle of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Columba. This role has identified the nature of the some of the marvellous phenomena as gifts of the Spirit.

We have seen a clear identification of the operation of the eschatological Spirit prophesied in the Old Testament, poured out in the New, and now continuing his activity in the age of the inaugurated kingdom of God, at the ends of the earth. Adomnán's understanding has a sophistication and a broad range of description. We have recognised that Adomnán does not impute to Columba supernatural ability. Rather, he makes it clear that the activity described is not human, but a gift of the divine. In this, we can perceive clear echoes of the teaching of bishop Paphnutius, as recorded by Cassian. Paphnutius follows scriptural teaching in insisting that it is God's initiative and enabling that produces virtue of every type (*Coll.* 3, see 15-20 especially). In this he is saying it is the 'flowering' of faith in the God who provides, and life lived in dependence on that God that produces the virtues. This faith is itself a gift, and needs God's intervention to maintain it, as the story of Jonah shows. A person's own virtue will not suffice to withstand temptation ; only virtue given by God will do so (*Coll.* 3.17).

For Adomnán, Columba is pre-eminently one who was powerful in this Spirit of prophesy, following on from the biblical prophets, operating in the 'weaker' gift of both testaments. This identification functions as signifying Columba's intimacy with God. All of these manifestations / phenomena are fully in accord with the biblically prophesied and reported results of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit that would occur as the Kingdom was established. In each of the examples of the prophetic gift, Adomnán shows how the Spirit brings a marvellously augmented perception to those who receive the revelations. The perception may be directly to the mind, or received in terms understood of the natural senses, but not by natural ability. We thus have in Adomnán a rich and diverse description of the range of expressions that this outpouring might take. We may note that the explicit linking of the Spirit's activity in each of the instances which we have studied argues for this same functioning nature for all the reported instances of prophetic activity. In this, Adomnán can be seen to share a style with biblical writers who, having established the agency of the Spirit in both the life of Jesus and of the disciples, did not continuously mention the Spirit in connection with these phenomena. There are very many more instances of the same phenomena in the *VC* which do not have this explicit description, but in that there are no recorded instances of the prophetic which do not fit into the above series, it is difficult to infer that Adomnán sees the nature and functioning of the gift as being

anything other than the operation of the eschatological presence of the Spirit in his patron's life. The prophetic activity in which he is so fully described as engaging is the first and most important sign, for Adomnán, of this presence. Where God speaks, there is God's Kingdom. None of the oracles Columba utters have an eschatological reference as such, (he does not refer to the Day of the Lord, the last days, the judgment, the new creation etc). However we do see in them the inexorable progress of the establishment of the rule of God amongst those who come into contact with this harbinger of the Kingdom, and we see that in the very act of prophesying by the Holy Spirit, he is realising the biblically prophesied conditions of the Kingdom (Joel 2.28/Acts 2.17).<sup>86</sup>

We can conclude contra Fowler that though Adomnán mentions Columba as a preacher of God's message to the unconverted as we have seen, he sought to present him quite deliberately as one operating in the biblical model of the prophet, strong in the pneumatic gift of prophecy (i50 *prophetica gratia*), empowered by the various operations of the Spirit of Prophecy. Paul provides the only extended discussion of the early Christian's experience of this phenomena operating amongst them, albeit in a discussion skewed by its corrective function. He refers to prophecy amongst a list of various *pneumatika*, all of which derive from the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 4, he refers to those who had callings to the office, amongst others, of 'prophet', second only in rank to that of apostle.

Adomnán regarded Columba's exercise of prophecy and word of knowledge as the major sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. As such, it confirms the standing of Columba as one in whom the eschatological gift of the Spirit has been poured out, and as one who sees with the perception of the kingdom of God.

In observing these attributions, we are forcibly reminded of the insistence of Adomnán that Columba was operating not as some sort of talented superman, with marvellous innate abilities of his own. Rather, he was one whose human spirit was joined to the Spirit of God; the human and divine spirits were united into one, and thus operated as one, the human sharing characteristics of the infinitely greater divine. The Spirit of God, as third person of the Trinity, is co-equal in the omnipotence of God (which Adomnán explicitly recognises (ii3, 12, 34, 42, 43), the omniscience of God, and the omnipresence of God. Thus in being united to this God, the spirit of Columba, and

---

<sup>86</sup> Given Adomnán's presentation in this light, a question we are left with is, what went wrong; why when the gospel had reached to the ends of the earth did Adomnán not see the ushering in of the Kingdom? This question, as challenging today as it may have been to Adomnán himself, must be left to another to answer.



thus the man animated by this spirit, was able to operate in accordance with the grace and mercy of God, in his characteristics, albeit in a limited way. The pre-eminent manifestation for Adomnán is in Prophecy, in the two main divisions of prediction and knowledge of things absent. In this he follows none of his exemplars. Rather he follows Paul's evaluation of the πνευματικοί, where he makes prophecy the superior (1Cor 14.1-5). He shows a sophisticated understanding of the various ways in which this pneumatikon operates. Columba hears, sees, knows, is made aware, in the Spirit who reveals these things to him, either of the future, or of things in the present unseen by natural senses. Adomnán does not artificially classify the results of his observations of prophetic activity from the witnesses. This lends weight to the genuine nature of his record. Thus, again, we see Columba operating in the conditions of the Joeline eschatological promise. He lives the kingdom of God, in an 'already but not yet' mode. As Paul puts it in 1Cor 13.12, seeing partially, but not yet fully, like a dim image in a mirror..

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Missiological nature and function

'Columba converted the Picts to the faith of Christ  
by his words and example.' (HE III.4).

#### A. Summary

I have been arguing that Adomnán's presentation insists that the flowering of the Kingdom of God is to be found in: (1) marvellous eschatologically oriented manifestations (2) of the dynamic presence of the Spirit, who empowers these manifestations in Columba, (3) pre-eminently in the exercise of τὰ πνευματικά of prophecy. We have been seeking a determination of the function and nature of the marvellous, and have found that the two are tied together.

- Their conventional function in demonstrating that he was a man of faith in God is confirmed, but we can add that their nature make Columba one in whom the Spirit of God worked to bring the Kingdom of God into being in The Provinces:
- They function as signs of the presence of The Kingdom; their nature is seen as miniature realisations of the conditions of that kingdom in the age.
- They function as signs of Columba's membership of The Kingdom; their nature is as flowering of his faith, energised we see now by the work of the Spirit.
- They function as signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in Columba; their nature is that of manifestations of the operation of the Holy Spirit, ta\_ pneumatika/. The saint is thus himself a sign of the presence of the eschatological Spirit in The Provinces.

These observations enrich our understanding of the content of Adomnán's hagiographical portrait, but are we able to identify more of the landscape within which he places the figure? Changing the metaphor, is there more to the function of the marvellous blooms that has yet to be noticed and described so as to trace the overall picture which will bring shape and sense to the various pieces of the jigsaw that we have been identifying.

#### B. Columba the Missionary re-examined

##### 1. Bringing the Picts to faith?

It is well known that Bede describes Columba as one who came to Britain to preach the word of God to the provinces of the northern Picts. In contrast, Adomnán says Columba came as a 'pilgrim for Christ'. This is conventionally taken to mean that Adomnán saw his patron as one who spent his exile in seeking the perfect contemplation of God in ascetic, ethical rigour, following the monastic stereotype of

Cassian. Comparison with Adomnán's exemplars appear to show the VC as closer in flavour to the Lives of contemplatives Antony and Benedict than to missionaries Martin, Germanus and Patrick. There is little account of preaching crusades. Columba is not recorded as founding churches. He visits King Bridei f.Meilochon in cordiality to seek asylum on Orkney for his monk. He leaves the stone which protects Bridei to his dying day, and is not recorded as baptising this the last pagan Northern king, an event which couldn't have been missed. But is this impression true at a deeper, background level? Columba certainly engaged in a power contest with the magi as did St.Martin in Gaul. He ministers the gospel to the leader of a Skye war band. Is Columba's singing of Ps.44/5 a wooing of Bridei? Márkus points out the significance of its words, the second last verse especially regarding the inheritance of the king's sons. Adomnán's record allows honouring Columba's God as the outcome, but how significant is this in evangelistic terms? Peter Brown says of the early Christian missionaries that they proceeded: 'negotiating an honourable surrender of the old gods'. It is likely that Columba and his companions are only part of the story of the conversion of Pictland. Dal Riadan and British Christians probably played a role, but how much of a role did Iona have, given the current tentative consensus that its mission was focussed on asceticism.

The role played by Columba in the evangelisation of the Picts based on Bede's account has come under scrutiny. Kenney calls Columba 'greatest of Irish missionaries' (*Sources* 425), and Huyshe calls his visit to Pictland mission (145). Hughes(1970) believes Bede to be inaccurate: 'if Columba really had come, as Bede's informants told him, in order to preach to the Pictish people... Adomnán...would surely have recorded his successes'. She notes the stories concerning Pictland, but regrets 'it is surprisingly little for one who was supposed to have converted the northern Picts...'. She observes that Adomnán *does* say that Columba was received at court, with respect and fear, and that he does *not* say that Bridei, or the Pictish aristocracy was converted formally.<sup>1</sup> *If* they had been; *if* Iona had sent a powerful mission; *then* the evidence of conversion *would* be found. The literary and archaeological evidence leads to a rather negatively expressed conclusion that, 'there were undoubtedly Christians and some christian communities in seventh-century Pictland', albeit, 'as minor cells, established without royal patronage, exercising little influence on society' (51). She summarises: 'contrary to Bede's report...Ninian and Columba only started the work of evangelisation...it proceeded slowly' (52). 'Success' came with the evident conversion of Nechton by 724 (AU). Sharpe(1995) further doubts Bede's accuracy

1 p.48 in reprint ed. Dumville(1980)38-52. I will not be the first to note the error introduced into the reprint which makes Hughes say, 'what Adomnán does and does not say is worth *nothing*'.

regarding the progress of any mission, i.e. converting Bridei, thence to Iona, saying Bede is giving a politically adjusted view of the conversion (18), and that we can only guess whether Ionan monks of Columba's era were engaged on mission (22, 31) 'Adomnán does not really help either to confirm or refute Bede's depiction of Columba as a missionary to Pictland'... 'For the most part, Adomnán makes no attempt to describe the work of missionary preaching'. However he acknowledges the conversion of two families, and two references to preaching, and remembers that it was as their missionary 'for which Columba was remembered by the Picts who were Bede's informants' (32). Macquarrie(1997)77-8 is of a similar view, but suggests the anointing of Aedan(iii5) may have been part of a baptism, and that Columba went on to Pictland, before returning to establish Iona.<sup>2</sup> Clancy and Márkus(1995)119 give a more positive assessment. They note the thirteen years left to Columba for Pictish 'contact' after Bridei's death in 584, and the founding of Abernethy by Pictish kings who were thus likely to be Christian before 620. This royal patronage would indicate that evangelistic progress may not have been as slow as Hughes thought. This is supported by evidence from *Amra* presented by Hughes, Herbert, and Sharpe, to which they add: 'his blessing turned [the tribes of the Tay]...to the will of the King.' (VIII.6). By this Dallán must mean The Heavenly King, and thus again the concept of the heavenly Kingdom is present.

Columba may not have converted the entire northern Pictish people to the faith of Christ. Adomnán may not record the formal conversion of a king and court in Pictland. The process of evangelisation may have been slow, and only started by Columba. His pilgrimage may have been, like Fursa, seeking salvation and solitude, not motivated by the call to evangelise (Hughes 1970, 39). Adomnán does not explicitly present a mission of the type associated with Martin or Patrick. Evidently he did not see it as important to present his patron as having been involved in such systematic church planting in his own region. That Tirechán and Sulpicius had ecclesio-political reasons for their constructions of saintly missionary itinerary should, however, cause us to question their literary model of mission for the period. VC does not fit their model, thus it is not seen to present mission. The debate raises questions over our previous discussion in which we have traced Adomnán's description of Columba as one through whom the eschatological Kingdom comes. As we have seen, an essential component of this concept is the spreading of the Kingdom, following the

2 He bases the suggestion on similarities with i10, the blessing of Domnall, which 'it would be natural to read...as part of a baptismal ceremony.' Adomnán mentions baptism of both infant and adult elsewhere explicitly. Given the sacrament's importance in Christian initiation, it must be highly unlikely that he would miss the opportunity to mention it. The similarities of i10 and iii5 to each other are not evidence for the events having been baptism, so in the absence of liturgical evidence to the contrary, the suggestion must remain merely a suggestion.



great commission, as identified here in the vision of the robe. What then was the nature of Columba's pilgrimage; was the role of Columba seen as an apostolic missionary saint to Dalriada and Pictland at all? Was the Kingdom restricted only to Columba himself, or did faith blossom for other individuals and in other communities? How unusual was slow evangelisation; how usual was the early conversion of aristocrats? How should Bede be understood? Have the marvellous phenomena anything to contribute to our understanding of these question? We will consider the evidence Adomnán presents.

## 2. *Peregrinatio in the Vita Columbae*

One of the important assumptions upholding the received view is the understanding commonly brought to the term *peregrinatio*, on which Adomnán says Columba is engaged. Peregrination is a common practice of early Irish Christians, and normally taken to refer to a religious, ascetically oriented journey into isolated exile.<sup>3</sup> 'Getting away from it all' to spend time in rigorous mortification of the flesh, with the object of obtaining salvation. Hughes wonders whether Bede's 'very unusual' record of Columba as an evangelist rather than the standard ascetic saint is a product of Pictish propaganda (39). What is the content of the term *peregrinatio* and its cognates as used by Adomnán?

VC uses fall into two groups:

(i) Those describing the years Columba spent in Britain, Adomnán describes him as '*pro Christi peregrinari* (a pilgrim for Christ) (sp), who '*peregrinaturus... enauigauit* (sailed away to be a pilgrim)' (i7) from Ireland. Columba was '*in Britanniam peregrinantem* (living in pilgrimage in Britain)' (i13). ii10 is set '*cum sanctus in sua conuersaretur peregrinatione* (during the saint's life in pilgrimage, while he was making a journey)' to Pictland, and iii22 marks the beginning of the end "Thirty years have been completed *meae in Britannia peregrinationis* (of my pilgrimage in Britain)." Columba is looking for what he calls release from his residence, and he 'crossed over to the heavenly country *de hac tediali perigrinatione* (from this weary pilgrimage).' Thus Adomnán sees Columba as having spent 34 years in *peregrinatio*. In addition, in ii33, we read of the '*peregrinam captivam* (pilgrim captive)', an Irish woman (*scoticam*) held by Broichan as a slave. Anderson suggests she 'had been living as a nun in Britain'. Her plight is strongly reminiscent of the maidservants of God to whom Patrick refers, ('*quae seruítio detinentur*', *Conf* 42) and she could constitute a female predecessor to Columba as a missionary to the Picts.

3 Charles-Edwards (1976)43-59; Clancy & Markus(1995)157-8.

(ii) Seven visitors to Columba have the term applied to them, one of which is the famous crane of i48 (see chap.3 n.41 above). It came to rest, perhaps as a sign of the eschatological rest realised in Columba's presence, which is itself a sign of the presence of the eschatological Spirit. Its peregrination, with that of incognito Bishop Cronán (i44) is thus to 'sojourn in the Spirit' in the company of the Spirit bearer. Two brothers (i32) and an Irishman (iii7) stay for a medium term. For longer periods, visitors are required to take vows, thus entering fully into the life and ministry of the coenobium. One aspect of this life which we know about is that the abbot took out with him companions on further journeys, during which, as we have seen, the word was proclaimed (ii31ff etc), and the Kingdom extended. There are two penitent strangers/pilgrims (i36, ii39). Columba prophesies to one of them, Librán, 'your part in the Kingdom will be with my elect monks, and with them you will awake from the sleep of death into the resurrection of life.' Here we normally take monk to mean ascetic contemplative. We have another link with the idea of the three countries of earth, the kingdom of God on earth, and the kingdom of heaven.

Sharpe(n293) confirms that the normal Irish Latin meaning of *peregrina* refers to separation from one's homeland, rather than shrine-visiting in the continental / medieval sense. Thus, for Adomnán, the meaning he gives to the term comfortably describes Columba's 34 year sojourn, i.e. his whole ministry or mission, following his original sailing from Ireland in 563. It is not essentially a journey, for he is resident for much of the period on either Iona or Hinba. Nor is it only residential, as he makes a number of journeys. It is not actually exile, for he returns 'home' apparently freely,<sup>4</sup> but nor is his base at home, for he chooses to base himself in, or very close to, a different geo-political and cultural space than his own. When we look at the recorded highlights of the *peregrinatio*, we see strong elements of ascetic coenobitism and eremiticism, but the community is far from closed, and far from introverted. Members make frequent visits elsewhere, records of which present some as having clear evangelistic components. The journeys are part of the *peregrinatio* upon which Columba is engaged. We can thus clearly see some sense of 'evangelistic mission' in the term as used for Columba. He left his own to become a stranger in another country. He took the word of the Lord to those people, and saw converts, baptising them in the name of the Father Son, and Holy Spirit, according to the great commission of Mt 28.29. In this he anticipates the 'new, more concrete application of the Irish *peregrinatio pro Christo*, now understood as a mission' of Amand and Willibrord.<sup>5</sup>

---

4 i3 (580) & i49 (575/590).

5 Hillgarth (1987)323.

His preaching was accompanied by signs and wonders, as was that of Christ, Adomnán's principal model for Columba; the prophets; and especially the Apostles on their mission to the pagan world. The *Amra*'s reference to Columba being in Britain to follow the path of obedient holiness of 'the four' (evangelists? (VI.1, 27)) adds credence to the picture. I have argued above that the VC contains within it a clear record of the establishment, through Columba and what we might call his co-missioners, of the kingdom of God in these Provinces. The striking image Adomnán gives of the spread of this kingdom as the blossoming of many flowers across the fields and mountains of these Provinces (ii.1) may even have in his mind an etymological association with *peregrinatio*, which comes through the post-classical derivation of *per-ager*, 'who has gone through the lands.'<sup>6</sup> Thus in Adomnán, to be involved in a peregrination may hold the sense of to be involved in the mission of spreading the kingdom of God on the earth, in present realisation of the eschatological kingdom that has come, comes, and is to come.

The over-ridingly important feature of the *peregrinatio* for Adomnán is Columba's, and others, ministry in the marvellous. Prophecy, miracles of power, visions of light and encounters with angels are the features of the peregrination he wishes his readers to note. I wish to argue that these marvellous phenomena most naturally cohere with the ongoing missiological activity of the Holy Spirit.

### 3. Missiological activity in the *Vita Columbae*

Adomnán describes Columba as '*animarum dux ad caeleste regnum* (a leader of souls to the heavenly kingdom)' (i2, iii1). His function is thus to lead people into the kingdom of God which is present on earth, in preparation for its fulfillment in heaven. Entry into this kingdom can only be by the Johannine doorway of rebirth by Spirit (Jn 3.3), a view with which we see in the Pictish conversion tales Adomnán concurring explicitly. In practical terms, those who are to be led into the Kingdom, outwith whose courts they stand prior to baptism in water and Spirit, must either come to a place where they can hear the gospel, and accept its invitation, or they must be sought out in order to apprise them of the invitation they have been offered. Fintán is sent to Leinster to set up his mission. Columba, elected as a leader of innumerable souls to the heavenly country (iii1), establishes his mission on Iona. According to VC, Iona was not, in Columba's time, a centre for mass pilgrimage of pagan folk seeking salvation, however much it was a centre for those, such as Fintán, seeking a peregrinatory career, or penance for falling from righteousness. Adomnán does not

---

6 L&S 1338.

describe the bringing of many souls to the Kingdom. So how does he envisage his hero as one who would, indeed as one who did so? We must review the key pieces of evidence which indicate definite missiological activity in the VC. In this process, we will address the question of how 'conversion' is signified in the VC.

(i) First, the eschatological element in Adomnán's thinking. He presents the life as occurring 'In the last years of the world' (sp:3a). We have seen (cap.3) how this eschatological awareness is closely linked in the biblical world view to the completion of the mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. The end is clearly presented in *Altus Prosator*, R-Z. Patrick's and Adomnán's holding of the view of their territory in these terms is confirmed by Clancy & Márkus(1995)6, and O'Loughlin (1997)14f (esp.19).

(ii) Adomnán's identification of Columba with Jonah may be further pressed in the identity of this prophet as missionary to the pagans of Ninevah. The book of Jonah relates the progress of this mission, including reluctant beginnings, a sea voyage, encounter with a great sea creature, the delivery of the message, and salvation brought to the pagans. Each of these elements are also included in the VC, though not in the order of Jonah. Unlike Columbanus, who explicitly claims to follow in Jonah's wake, Adomnán does not explicitly draw out the parallels. However, the link is made in the explicit association. So, again early in the text, we are seeing Adomnán setting the scene for his description of Columba in terms which would fire off clear associations in the minds of his readers. Here it is of Columba, son of the Spirit, the sign of the Kingdom and missionary of the Kingdom to the pagans, just as 'Jonah was a sign to the [gentile] Ninevites'. (Lk. 11.30).

(iii) Adomnán records Patrick's disciple Mauchte as referring to the 'fields of our two monasteries' (sp:3a); i.e. the Patrician paruchia, and Columba's paruchia. It is almost certainly, taken with his now well known phrase in the first preface, the field in which the seeds of the Kingdom are planted, and in which they will bloom. So he has Mauchte sowing the Kingdom in one field, and Columba, over 'only a little hedge' sowing it in the Provinces. The connection of the image of the mission field with the Kingdom is plain in the NT, and would be a natural image for Adomnán to adopt if referring to a mission of the sort I am arguing for:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore for the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest." (Matthew 9.37-38//Lk 10.2).

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field ...the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom" (Mtt.



13.24, 38 cf.31).

But we will not boast without measure, but according to the measure (*mensuram*) of the rule which God has measured for us (*quam mensus est nobis Deus*), a measure (*mensuram*) to reach even unto you. (2 Cor. 10:13).<sup>7</sup>

(iii) Various tales contain an almost explicit description of the process of evangelistic mission:

(a) i33. Artbranan, a '*gentilis*' old man of Skye received the Word of God from Columba via an interpreter, believed, and was baptised as a Christian. Columba knew by prophetic revelation of his imminent arrival, and his spiritual state, cf. Christ and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4) / Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8.26).

(b) ii32. A pictish layman 'with his whole household',<sup>8</sup> listed as wife, children and servants, 'heard and believed the word of life, through an interpreter, at the preaching of' Columba, and believing, they were baptised as Christians. It is difficult to read this tale in a way which suggests Columba was not engaged in active evangelism.

(c) iii14. A Pictish family of '*gentili*' of Urquhart in Pictland are recorded as new believers in the word of God preached by Columba. Emchath, his son Virolec 'and his whole house' are baptised as Christians. Columba had again been informed by the Holy Spirit with the knowledge of this appointment.

(d) ii10. As a baby, Ligu Cenncalad of Ardnamurchan is baptised. Adomnán makes no claim for Columba to have converted his parents who would almost certainly be Christians here. Columba's prophesy of his life foresees his satiating the desires of his flesh in youth, but 'thereafter, fit to be delivered up, marching out in continuous Christian warfare (*deinceps cristianae usque in exitum militiae mancipandus* .)' We are told nothing of what brought about this conversion from youthful licentiousness, except that it happened. Adomnán is thus prepared to make a distinction between baptism and later becoming an active Christian.

(e) ii9. We should finally notice Éogenán. He is described explicitly as a Pictish presbyter (*prespiterum gente Pictum*) (ii9). Sharpe(1995 n.233) follows O'Rahilly in dismissing the idea that he could have been an 'Irish Pict'. He is thus a converted Pict from the island of Britain who has reached some measure of maturity as a Christian,

<sup>7</sup> The terms rendered 'measure' here can carry the sense of measured-off ground (from its root, *metior*, L&S 1140) i.e. a field, or mission field, as the context goes on to show. The verse could thus be understood '...but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to yours.' Adomnán may allude to this verse in his reference to Patrick, in that he refers to the 'mission' field in which the Columban church operates, confirming our assessment. However, Adomnán may be signalling that he is not going to adopt the same tactics of his competitor in claiming churches established by other patrons than his own; he would, piously, let God speak in showing God's activity in the mission of Columba across on his own side of the hedge.

<sup>8</sup> c.f Jn 4.53; Acts 16.15; 11.14; 16.31; 18.8.

now working in Leinster. The chronology and geography here is problematic. This is the second of two tales regarding books written in Columba's hand, and may both refer to a time some 'cycles of many years' after Columba's death (ii8). There is no certainty that Adomnán sees him as a northern Pict, though given the lack of recognition of southern Picts in VC, it seems more than likely that he does. However, there is nothing to suggest this Pict was not converted during Columba's journeys to Pictland.

There are thus three clear instances where Columba engages in evangelism. In two cases, he is described as being directed by the Spirit. This cannot be described as other than a divine call to evangelise. In the last case, we may be observing one of the individual products of this mission.

(v) *Conversion.*

The four tales above confirm that Columba goes out preaching the Word in the power, and using the gifts, of the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> This activity is recorded for both Pictland and Dalriada, though in the latter, we infer that the parents were already baptised as Christians. This inference draws a contrast between the two territories; one 'converted',<sup>10</sup> one yet pagan. References to 'barbarians' in the non-Dalriadan territory confirm the view: the Miathi may be a group living between Pict and Briton (i8: Sharpe n81); those who attacked Crog reth, beside Loch Rannoch (?) (i46); and those living along the R.Ness (ii27). Even by the close of Columba's life, Adomnán is still reporting the existence of 'barbarian' nations who will nevertheless honour Iona (iii23:128a). Thus his mission, such as it was, is not presented as having converted these nations in entirety by his death.

- 
- 9 a feature entirely missed by advocates of the 'baptism of pagan belief' school. W.J. Watson (1915) in a paper heavily influenced by Plummer's *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, believes the baptisms of Ercath and Artbranan to be little more than 'saining', the making of the sign of the cross over pagan natural goodness, what he calls the 'keynote of the attitude of the church to a whole department of pagan beliefs...the rite of baptism turns the pagan natural goodness into Christian goodness.' (263-4) In this he ignores the role of proclamation of the Word, and the leading of the Spirit which preceded the baptism, and the fact that the practice Adomnán describes being no novelty in the Christian tradition. How else may a pagan become a Christian than by accepting the word, being baptised, and engaging in Christian warfare?
- 10 Márkus (Spes Scotorum) has suggested that Dal Riada was thoroughly Christianised by the time Columba came there. Land was given by the king on arrival, unlikely if the king was not Christian; his successor sought ordination by Columba; a child is baptised; Eigg, and Tiree were all active in Columba's time [though Adomnán doesn't mention the first]. This Christianised area must have had a pastoral structure to service it. Dumville (1993) 188 suggests an ecclesiastical infrastructure would be in place in Dalriada by the mid 6th century and that Iona was a monastic appendage of this. He names Bishops occurring in the record, incl. VC (i5, i36, i44, i50, ii1, iii4); no controversy over Iona's consecration practice was raised at Whitby, so it is highly unlikely to have been irregular.

Bridei, king of the Picts, and his *magus* Broichan. Columba makes attempts at their conversion, singing (amplified) psalms outside the palace (i37c); opening the door of the palace by the sign of the cross and miraculous strength (ii35); demonstrating his God's supremacy over the god of the *magi* (ii33, 34); providing Bridei with a healing stone for Broichan, smitten by angelically delivered judgement. No word signifying conversion is recorded on Bridei's or Broichan's lips, though alarm at the power; reverence for, and the great honour of high esteem, for Columba himself (ii35, where the king and his senate condescend to leave their house, going to meet Columba and his associates at the opened door with pacifying words of peace), are shown. As we have noted, Hughes regards the lack of aristocratic conversion in VC as lack of success. This is success in terms of lack of evidence of conversion on a national scale which follows the conversion of rulers. Henderson(1967)70 wants the encounter to fit the model to the extent of suggesting Bridei withheld his baptism to the end of his life, for which there is no evidence.<sup>11</sup> As Patrick observed earlier for his own mission, the time had not yet come for the conversion of kings (*Conf.*52). Adomnán writes rather with his eyes on the evangelist's accounts of the mission of Christ and the Apostles. Here lack of success in converting kings is also signal, as is the lack of any mass conversion up until Pentecost. It would be nearly three centuries before the most 'successful' conversion occurred. Neither the earthly Christ nor his Apostles converted the nations by the time of their deaths. This should not be taken for lack of success in bringing people to faith, Adomnán's code for establishing the Kingdom.

The stories of the Gleann Mór Picts bring us to the question of how conversion is signified in VC. The account of believer's baptisms above is conclusive; the sacrament seals the conversion. Other groups are not described as being baptised, but as glorifying or magnifying the God of the Christians. Adomnán's description requires more exploration. Sharpe understands Columba's aristocratic lineage to have remained, in his boyhood, unconverted to the Christian faith, as shown by their practising royal inauguration at the pagan Feast of Tara, up until 560.<sup>12</sup> The Southern Uí Néill king Diarmait mac Cerbaill whom Adomnán describes as having been King of Ireland (i36), was last to attend the feast, in that year. He was supplanted as high-king by the Northern Uí Néill in 565.<sup>13</sup> Columba was of Northern Uí Néill stock, first cousin to Ainmire mac Sétna of Cenél Connaill, who became high king in 566.

11 notwithstanding her citing Penda of Mercia's deferral.

12 Sharpe(195) n.157, 80. One wonders if there is any requirement to interpret attendance at a pagan festival as necessarily indicative of an unconverted state. May it not be that conversion in every respect took some time, and that the foundational ceremony for inaugurating kingship could be among the later practices to be Christianised or abandoned? Is it certain that the feast of Tara was at this stage still the pagan festival it had been?

13 Sharpe(1995) 10, n.157.

Thus although his southern kin might manifest pagan characteristics as late as 560, when his northern, and immediate kin take over the high kingship, this particular expression of pagan adherence apparently ends. If we take Sharpe's indication of pagan adherence from the performance of the Tara rituals, we may deduce the opposite from non-participation. Thus, we see the coming to power of an already converted Northern Uí Néill dynasty. Taking Columba's conventional birth date as 521,<sup>14</sup> this would make him 39 years of age at this point, and only three years away from his peregrination. The possibility that Columba and his close kin were by this stage already converted is thus suggested by their non-celebration of Tara upon gaining the high kingship.

Following the incident with the beast of River Ness:

...the pagan barbarians who were there at the time, impelled by the magnitude of this miracle that they themselves had seen, magnified the God of the Christians (ii27)

Similarly, where a family is baptised after hearing and believing, a powerful miracle of resuscitation following the death of one of their sons releases the glorification of God:

Then a shout (clamor) of the people arose, mourning was turned into rejoicing, the God of the Christians was glorified. (ii32)

The shout itself has eschatological significance as the shout of salvation (Isa 42.10-13; Jer 31.7; Zeph 3.14f etc.) as does the transformation of mourning (Isa 61.3, adopted as Christ's agenda in Lk 4.18f). This follows the gloating of the *magi* who saw the sudden post-baptismal illness of the boy as a sign of the weakness of the Christian's God:

...they began...to magnify their own gods as the stronger, and to belittle the Christians' God as the weaker.

Adomnán does not depict his Spirit-filled hero preaching to crowds like Peter, but his mission is otherwise conversant with a biblical model. The evangelists are Adomnán's primary model. Following the healing of the paralytic, a crowd glorifies God who had given such power to men (Mtt 9.8//). Similarly, seeing the eschatological miracles, a crowd glorifies the God of Israel (Mtt 15.31). Following a resuscitation, fear seizes the crowd as they realise the power of God made manifest (Lk 7.16). This same fear seizes Bridei in i37 and ii35. Pictland is the last remaining unevangelised field in the north of the Isles of the Ocean, and so the signs of divine power bring fear:

so that those who dwell at earth's farthest bounds are afraid at thy signs (Ps 65:8).

The gospel writers are content to leave these reports as they are, without adding that the people were baptized, 'converted', or that they began to follow Jesus. As with the

---

14 Sharpe(1995)9.



people of Pictland, we are not told if this is the case, but the implication of their giving the glory to the God of the Christians is that they both accept his reality and power, and that in this assent, they are in a definite way aligning themselves with Columba's God. Thus Adomnán presents reaction to the marvellous phenomena accompanying Columba in a similar light to the way the evangelists presented the reaction to those accompanying Jesus. The reaction of giving the God of the Christians glory is deemed sufficient to his purpose in showing the spreading, with Columba, as with Jesus for Palestine, of the kingdom of God in the Provinces. It is possible that Adomnán has a similar scenario in mind for Bridei, where honouring Columba means honouring what and who he represents. That the white stone was retained until the moment of Bridei's death, when it disappeared, suggests time for true repentance may have been left, and that Columba's influence remained powerful. The faith spread slowly until rulers were converted, when the political advantages of 'faith' helped progress. Adomnán is perhaps more realistic than the historian in his portrayal of the progress of evangelistic mission. Our concentration on aristocratic and political conversion perhaps seek a mark of success which does not concur with the gospel as understood by Adomnán.

(vi) The *Amra*. Others have noted the account of Columba preaching to the tribes of the Tay (I.15), and that 'his blessing turned them... who lived on the Tay, to the will of the King, from the dark journeys of man' (VIII.5-7). He is also described as 'messenger of the Lord' (I.13); that 'his work poured out saints'; (VI.5); that he prepared 'crowds...under the holy law' (VII.11); and that he died 'guardian of a hundred churches.' (VII.3) Thus, though it is an idealised portrait, with the hundred churches perhaps meaning many, one of the features of this man's life, which Dallan wishes to celebrate, is his evangelistic mission.

(vii) Adomnán indicates the continuation of the Ionan ecclesia in ii46. The presence of Columban monasteries in Dalriada and Pictland gave protection from the ravages of the plague, 'although neither people is without great sins' which God forbears to judge (ii46). Adomnán looks on the hearts of the people, not the 'conversion' of the rulers. The record of growth, albeit in small cells, is nevertheless evidence for the historical mission of the Columban church in the era immediately following 597. It is feasible, though difficult, to ascribe this missiological activity only to the inspiration and initiative of Columba's successor abbots of Iona. However it must be unlikely that this activity had little precedent in the example of the founder who was to inspire and motivate the Ionan paruchia. The outline and detail of the progress of this mission must be left to others to describe, but taken as an historical reality, it can only confirm the view developed above that Columba was involved in mission as part of his

peregrination. Bede's statement that Columba brought the Northern Picts to faith should not be interpreted too literalistically. Bede would understand the idea that the apostles brought salvation to the ends of the earth (Mtt 28.19), but this does not mean they did it personally. Columba may only have been the one who started the mission, but Bede was concerned to state that he *was* the one who brought the apostolic commission to Pictland.

(viii) Finally we must recognise the necessity of caution in drawing too firm an inference from silence. The lack of evidence of a widespread evangelistic mission is not the same thing as evidence demonstrating a lack of such a mission. It would surely have suited Armagh, Kildare and Bede's propagandist purpose to seek to belittle Iona's success. While this may have resulted in silence in the former two cases, it is not the case for Bede who is happy to ascribe the conversion of the Picts to Iona. His positive gloss on the process, giving Columba perhaps more credit than he deserved, wherever the information came from, does not impress one as the action of someone concerned to demonstrate the unreliability of a divergent paruchia. Again, the difference in terms of durable evidence between conversion of individuals, a biblical and Adomnán-ish concern, and that of aristocrats must be borne in mind, i.e. it is only the latter that usually leaves tangible evidence. We should also remember Bede's familiarity with missionary saints; many saints in his *historia* are not eremitic ascetics. Cuthbert, Augustine of Canterbury, Germanus, Martin all took the gospel to areas in need of evangelisation, following their Apostolic predecessors. Thus Hughes' puzzlement as to why Bede should identify Columba with this noble company is perhaps vitiated.

*C.The Marvellous and mission: signs, wonders and spiritual gifts as tools*

The broad question we have been pursuing concerns the incorporation of the marvellous phenomena into a functional framework. Adomnán is careful to depict the peregrination of Columba as filled with marvellous events. What is the relationship between the peregrination and the marvellous? For Adomnán, the ethical fruit of the present Spirit is the implicitly assumed soil in which the marvellous flowers of faith grow. We have traced an eschatological realisation. The empowering presence of the Spirit enables the operation of the various marvellous phenomena deployed to the task in which Columba is engaged. I have been arguing that it is in part the mission of establishing the kingdom of God, a kingdom which is, in part, demonstrated practically, physically, manifestly, by the presence of the Spirit empowered and other supernatural phenomena. We can see this mission in action, but how do the phenomena fit into it? Our final task is to draw comparison between the manifestations

of God's glory, the signs of miraculous power in the VC, with those in scripture, and to assess their rôle as signifying a mission to propagate the Kingdom in the Provinces. Is there any evidence in the collection which would infer the field from which they were gathered was also, in fact, a mission field, not simply an ascetic garden?

Let the reader reflect how great and of what nature was the venerable man, in whom almighty God made manifest to the heathen people the glory of his name through those signs of miraculous power (*miraculorum uirtutibus*) described above (ii34).

Adomnán's principal point here is, once again, the sanctified nature of Columba which it is his purpose to present. However, the terminology of the supporting argument he employs to make his case claims that God manifested this glory to the *plebe gentilica*, through the signs of miraculous power (*miraculorum uirtutibus*). Prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, healings, miracles, visions, maybe tongues, are all represented in the panoply of pneumatically empowered manifestations of the Kingdom which, with angelic and luminary signs of the presence of heaven on earth, Adomnán employs to paint his portrait.

We have noted the allusion between this manifestation of glory, and the evangelist's record of Jesus' mission which is accompanied by similar manifestations. Jesus established the Kingdom by proclamation, accredited through Spirit-empowered miracles the precise nature of which remain under debate. That these phenomena authenticated the spoken word by demonstrations of supernatural power is known. The power motif was adopted as the first attempt to establish communication in a language the tribes would understand. When preaching would have been unlikely at first to succeed, a demonstration of God's power might.

Richardson, Turner et al. extend the function of the phenomena, as we have seen above, as themselves demonstrating, incarnating, the presence of the eschatological kingdom as it is partially realised in the era which preceeds the final consumation. Various terms apply to these phenomena, including signs, miracles, wonders, and 'demonstrations of the Spirit's power':

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. (Acts 2.22)

It was not only Jesus whose word was thus accompanied, but his apostles and other disciples follow the model, preaching the gospel, and see it confirmed by various marvellous signs. The post-Pentecost careers of Peter, John and Paul recorded in Acts show this clearly:

Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them

and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. (Mark 16:20).

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. (Acts 2:43 & see 5.12)

but signs and wonders were not the sole preserve of the twelve as other disciples were included:

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. (Acts 6:8)

When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. (Acts 8:6)

The writer to the Hebrews provides the key to understanding where the variety of marvellous manifestations which Adomnán attributes to Columba might fit:

God also testified to it [salvation in Christ] by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Hebrews 2:4).

The writings of Paul include various references to his having proclaimed the word of God to the pagan gentiles, and that this proclamation in words was accompanied by 'signs and wonders following', which were performed by the Holy Spirit:

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done-- by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. (Rom. 15:18-19).

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,' (1Cor. 2:4, cf. 1Thess. 1:5).

He records the early understanding of the nature of these phenomena:

Now concerning spiritual gifts (*de spiritualibus*)...To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings (*gratia sanitatum*) by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles (*operatio virtutum*), to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of utterances. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills...And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12.7-11, 28).

Two sets of marvellous phenomena are explicitly the result of the Spirit's operation: Rom 12.6-8 (Vulgate renders *donationes* for χαρίσματα), and 1Cor.12-14 (Vulgate renders *spiritualibus* for τῶν πνευματικῶν [12.1, c.f. 14.1]; *gratiarum* for χαρισμάτων [12.4] and *manifestio Spiritus* for Paul's general term φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος [12.7]). Peter mentions these gifts (*gratiae Dei*) briefly (1Pet.4.9-11), and



links them to giving glory to God.<sup>15</sup> Adomnán uses the terms, e.g: Columba's prophetic activity is delivered by the granting of the divine Spirit (*divini Spiritus gratia* (i37.39b); *gratia sancti spiramini* (iii18)) or God granting it (*deo donante* (i4)); his visionary knowledge as granted by divine grace (*divina hoc contulit gratia* (i43, i1:10b); his discernment revealed by the same (*reuelata diali gratia* (i50)); miracles he performed were by the gift of God (*deo donante perficerat* (i1.10a; ii3, 15, 21, 42.97b); Ernéne would receive eloquent, doctrinally healthful utterance given by God (*a deo donabitur* (1.3)).

As we survey VC phenomena, we observe a coherence with the first century lists of Paul, where he explicitly links the manifestations with the presence and activity of the Spirit. Adomnán knows this apostle's writing. Thus a further model for the marvellous surrounding his patron may be Paul's description of *ta pneumatika*, the gifts of grace of the Spirit. Columba is presented as delivering, by, in, through the Spirit messages of wisdom, knowledge, prophecy; as ministering gifts of healing to the sick, as performing diverse miracles, and as discerning spirits. The only item in Paul's 1 Cor 12 lists definitely not featured in the VC is the interpretation of tongues, spiritual or natural (as we have seen, Columba employs the services of a translator). Adomnán would be aware of Paul's priorities, reflected in the predominance of the gifts of prophetic utterance, and the practical non existent incidence of tongues in VC.

Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy...he who prophesies is geater than one who speaks in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:1, 5).

Adomnán is concerned to identify Columba with the church's elite ministers as 'a man both prophetic and apostolic' (ii32). Paul identifies those through whom particular gifts are given regularly as ministers of these gifts:

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers... (1Cor. 12. 28)

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Marvellous accompaniment was regarded as authorising Apostolic function:

The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance. (2Cor. 12.12).

Further, we should note the numerous pastoral references in *Amra* (I.9, 10, 11, 19;

---

<sup>15</sup> For a full treatment of the *pneumatika*, see G.D.Fee (1994).

VI.24, 26, 27; VII.3) with pastoral notes in VC. Thus, we may see the portrait of a man exercising variously the functions of Ephesians 4.11, the aim of which is the establishment of the church. Paul makes it clear (1 Cor.12.7, 14.3-5; Eph 4.12) that the purpose of the phenomena is for mutual usefulness (συμφέρων / *utilitate*) and edification (οικοδομην / *aedificatio*), the building up, of the church, and specifically mentions the place of prophecy in mission:

if an unbeliever hears prophecy he will be convicted, the secrets of his heart made manifest, and he will do homage to God. (1Cor 14.24).

Thus we are seeing the phenomena in the practice of Christ, of Paul and the other early disciples mentioned above, exercised in a missionary context. Paul insists that it is from the one God in Trinity that τὰ πνευματικά derive, not from the idols of the gentiles (1Cor 12.1-6). We can thus say that Adomnán records the three categories of marvellous phenomena as signs of the 'equipping' of Columba *et al.* for the task of spreading the kingdom. Adomnán saw the NT record as normative for a Christian life including mission, and he sought to present Columba as accredited like the apostles and prophets by these phenomena in spreading the Kingdom to the unevangelised at the ends of the earth. As Swete said,

He Himself [i.e. the Spirit] is the cause of the progressive witness of Christendom to Christ. <sup>16</sup>

In noticing the place of the Spirit of God in this process, we see the spiritual dynamic which empowers the mission. This is no mere promulgation of good ideas or of a new ethic, nor even of a new philosophy. Underlying, directing, empowering and in fact bringing into being the conditions wherein these new ways of living can be lived, Adomnán shows us the action of the Holy Spirit. He works through the holy, sacrificially given and open life of this one who acts as a channel for the grace of God, ministered by the Spirit, into a world of unredeemed souls. As these lay themselves open to this grace, so they come into their own experience of the presence of the inaugurated kingdom of God. The seed is planted by the proclamation of the gospel, in places directed by the omniscient Spirit, watered by the river of life flowing through the channel provided in the life of the holy one, and brought to flower by the nurturing presence of the same Spirit. Adomnán records for us all of this, albeit in the background. Adomnán seeks to present Columba as a type of Christ, attended by a similar series of accrediting marvellous phenomena. Following Turner, we see the realisation of the Kingdom, linking the marvellous with the activity of the eschatological Spirit. This observation pushes us to consider a more sophisticated

---

<sup>16</sup> Swete (1912)314.

understanding of the marvellous in Adomnán than simple borrowing of good stories from the gospels would allow. It is inconceivable that with the identification of this element in Adomnán's writing, made the more important by its implicit nature running through the weave of the tapestry, Adomnán is not understanding the continuing mission of Jesus, worked through his holy servant, in establishing the Kingdom on earth, as mission.

*D. Continuity of Signs, Wonders and spiritual gifts to the 6th century.*

Two critical questions arise at this point if we approach these reports from the perspective of pursuing the elusive question of any element of historicity in Adomnán's report. Firstly, is there any evidence that Adomnán is doing other than adopting the signs of the apostle, the signs of the Kingdom, from scripture, and transferring them onto his subject in an exercise of literary composition. Secondly, is there any evidence that the thaumaturgical tradition into which Adomnán evidently wishes to place his subject was anything but a literary tradition in the life of the church to his day; in other words, that the same process of a literary continuation of biblical 'authentication' tales was all Adomnán was building upon. It will be helpful to pursue the answers to the second question first, as the results of this will have a bearing on the answer we can formulate to the first.

i. Continuity: So, was the hagiographical / thaumaturgical tradition in which Adomnán writes simply a literary genre? Is there any evidence for the presence of the manifestations of the Kingdom, by the Spirit, in the life of the church up to Adomnán's day in any sources other than the hagiographical/ thaumaturgical? What were the attitudes of pre-7th century orthodox Christians to these 'gifts of the Spirit'? Answering this question is hampered by a dearth of published writing and research into these aspects of the manifest activity of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup> The major attention of Christian thinkers and writers has been drawn to the Trinitarian problem of the nature and place of the Spirit in the Godhead. As a result, Patristic writings and their expositors have said little concerning the question we seek enlightenment on here. However, the witness of the Fathers is not silent, if, as I have done with the VC, the question is pursued at the level of underlying thoughts which crop up almost incidentally. In addition, the *Lives* of the saints are replete with references to marvellous phenomena similar to those we study here. Three such studies have recently demonstrated in the writings of the pre- and post-Nicene fathers a record of the continuation of both the awareness of and, if the witness be accepted as reliable, the occurrence of such manifestations in the post biblical era. Evelyn Frost(1940),

---

17 As Kelsey(1973)158 avers in reference to part of the range of pneumatic phenomena.

then Ronald Kydd(1973; 1984) survey the period up to Nicea for the range of charismatic gifts, and Kelsey(1973) gives what Turner calls a 'balanced account of the witness of the fourth and fifth century fathers' with regard to then contemporary divine healing.<sup>18</sup> These three surveys, representing the opening reconnaissance of hitherto uncharted territory, clearly demonstrate the presence in the patristic record of the contemporary understanding and practice of the type of phenomena which Adomnán attributes to Columba in the sixth century. Turner records the lament of the cessationist Warfield,<sup>19</sup> that many claims for subsequent miracles come from leading theological thinkers.<sup>20</sup> Warfield rejected contemporary miraculous occurrence on grounds of radical scepticism, employed because of his *a priori* belief in the cessation of the miracles after the apostolic age. He does not apply the same standard of proof to biblical miracles.<sup>21</sup> Working from the more open minded perspective from which I have been analysing the VC, we see that the evidence presented by these fathers, along with Cassian (d.after 430),<sup>22</sup> Gregory of Tours, the well-informed historian of the Franks (d.594),<sup>23</sup> Gregory I (d.604),<sup>24</sup> and Isidore of Seville (d.636) is consistent in its presentation, in non hagiographical writing as well as the hagiographic genre, of

- 
- 18 Turner(1996)300, note 47. Kelsey (136-154) cites Justin, Origen, Cyprian, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Quadratus, Theophilus of Antioch, Arnobius, Lactantius (c4). He can say, 'For nearly three centuries this healing... was an indispensable ingredient of Christian life.' (154). For the post Constantinian church, (159ff) he cites the accounts of the 10 major figures Athanasius, Basil Gt, Gregory Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory I, Sulpicius Severus [191 SS says many healed pagans went away believers] and Cassian. He calls these the 'sophisticated and brilliant men who laid the intellectual foundations of all mainline Christianity.' (161). He also cites the four historians Eusebius, Sozomen, Socrates Scholasticus and Theodoret; Palladius; Hippolytus; Innocent I; Bede. He notes that Jerome and Ambrose concentrated more on the symbolic meaning than on the phenomena *per se*. (194).
- 19 Benjamin Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, 38, cited in Turner(1996)300.
- 20 Now See Petersen(1984) chapter 4; 'The Miracle-Stories in the Dialogues seen in the context of Other Western Christian Writers; A. The attitude of Augustine towards Miracles.' (90-94). Augustine began as a cessationist, but by 427, evinced by *Civ. Dei*, he accepted modern miraculous occurrence.
- 21 See Turner(1996)286-302 for recent critique of the cessationist position, and Kelsey(1973)22-3 for its foundation in the early (but not later) writings of Luther, and in Calvin's Institutes (IV.18). Kelsey attributes the position ultimately to the growth of sceptical rationalism from the 16th century onwards.
- 22 Kelsey(1973)195 notes Cassian's preface to his account of healing (*Coll* 15.2, below). Cassian emphasised that healing came not as a result of monastic merit, but by the Lord's compassion, and warned against its too ready practice for fear of losing personal inward purity. It makes me wonder if Columba/Adomnán had been influenced by the same attitude in restricting the occurrence of healing c.f VSM, in which, as Kelsey observes (189) healing predominates, though VC is not reticent of healing e.g. ii6.
- 23 Who wrote eight *Miraculorum Libri*.
- 24 Four books of *Dialogues*. Kelsey (194ff) notes the development from Jerome and Cassian to Gregory (in his *Pastoral Rule* which though brought by Augustine to Canterbury, does not appear to have influenced Adomnán) of a growing attitude toward illness as a tool of divine discipline, rather than demonic attack, and thus bringing a diminution of emphasis on healing as a vital ministry. He regards this development to have affected Western attitudes to illness and healing into modern times, and Gregory's undiscerning attitude towards miracles as tending toward credulity. However, Kelsey emphasises their acceptance of the expectation of divine, miraculous, intervention.



the presence of these phenomena in the experience of the church right up to and including the time of Columba's mission.

Three particularly interesting example of non-hagiographic occurrence deserve special, if cursory mention. The first and second arise because of the reference in the *Amra* to the familiarity of Columba with the judgements of Basil (IV.10), and the books of Cassian (V.6).<sup>25</sup> As key figures in the development of monasticism, such familiarity is highly plausible for the coenobites of Iona.

(a) In his introduction to the ascetic works of Basil the Great, Clarke expresses his view that the study of Basil's understanding of the spiritual gifts is 'of great importance for the understanding of Basilian monasticism and deserve a full monograph in English'.<sup>26</sup> The monograph has yet to appear, but Basil's treatment of these phenomena may help to throw light upon that of Adomnán, who stands in the same monastic tradition. For Basil, who, Clarke reminds us, was 'the brilliant theologian to whom we owe *De Spirito Sancto*', enthusiasm (by which he means spiritual giftedness) 'meant the reproduction of the first ages of the church, when Pentecost was a living memory and the baptized were all filled with the spirit.'<sup>27</sup> Clarke considers the power of the *Rules* to be due to its author knowing the Spirit experimentally as well as theoretically. Basil's primary concern is to argue for coenobitic rather than solitary life, and one of the elements of his argument derives from Paul's descriptions of the gifts which are complete only where the body of Christ operates in coenobitic fashion. The contemporary manifestation of the charismatic gifts are not procurable by money; must be shared freely; worthy use brings further distribution; are not to be used for personal glory; and are diversely distributed (*Morals* LVIII-LX). The *Longer Rule* states: Christ bestows the working of signs and marvellous works in the Holy Spirit, though love is the sign of discipleship (F.3); no single man is sufficient to receive all gifts; they are common property, for the common good (F.7). F.32 mentions knowledge and wisdom; F.35[380B] 'spiritual gifts'; F.40 teaching, revelation, tongues, interpretation to edify; F.55[398C] healing. B303 mentions teaching, exhortation, prophesy. Basil specifically mentions obedience to the commands of Christ as qualification for the reception of the Spirit (B.204), and most significantly for Abbot Columba, states that the Superior of a coenobium needs the gift of foreseeing the future, he being the eye of the body (F.24, 43). This highlighting of Basil's mentioning the gifts must not be taken as suggesting he ranked them highly,

25 O.Chadwick(1968)37-8 says *Conferences* were more widely read than *Institutes* (49).

26 W.K.L.Clarke(1925)42.

27 Clarke(1925)44.

love comes far above, but the fact is, he describes them as present and operative in his coenobia. Clarke considers that contra Paul, they act as a crown to ethical sanctification, a tradition in which Adomnán stands, despite Basil's insistence that they not be used as a measure of greatness (*Mor.* LX). We should note that Basil also says they are given in proportion to faith (*Mor.* LVIII), a factor reminding us of Adomnán's 'flowering of faith'?

(b) Dallán does not specify which of Cassian's works Columba knew, but the Ionan writers of *Amra* and *Altus Prosator* had Cassian's *Conferences* 2, 8 and 14.<sup>28</sup> The *Conferences* contain incidental references to various charismatic gifts, and also a more deliberate consideration of their place in the life of the Christian community. While insecure as records of the teaching of the hermits, these documents contain Cassian's own views, however derived, and thus as a minimum give us an impression of his claimed experience and attitude towards these phenomena. Although primarily a champion of solitary asceticism, in recognising its dangers Cassian wishes with Basil to emphasise that the highest and abiding gift is love shown to a neighbour (45, 151, 15.2, 7). As a result, and because the gifts will, with faith and knowledge, die away, he says:

Hence we never see the Fathers caught up in these wonderworkings. By the grace of the Holy Spirit they were possessors of such capacities but they never wanted to use them unless they were coerced by utter, unavoidable necessity' (*Coll* 15.2).

Nevertheless, he teaches that the other gifts should be expected to be present in the body of Christ as represented in the communities. *Conference* 15 is dedicated to a general consideration of the gifts. *Conference* 2 concerns discernment, the gift which Cassian considers the most important. *Conference* 14 concerns Knowledge. He mentions specifically healing (14.19; 15.1, 4, 5,8), prophecy (14.8, 15.2), casting out demons (14.7 & 19; 15.7, 8; *Coll.* 7&8), raising the dead (15.3), and the rôle of the Spirit (47, 53, 60, 138, 163, 176, 201). Overall terms might be 'higher gifts of the Holy Spirit' (1.11) or 'apostolic signs' (14.4). They are for temporal use and need (1.11). In addition, the preface to the *Institutes* reads:

I shall make no attempt to relate tales of miracles and prodigies. I have heard from my elders of amazing marvels, and have seen some with my own eyes. But I have wholly omitted them. They contribute nothing but astonishment and do not otherwise instruct the reader in the life of holiness.'<sup>29</sup>

Adomnán evidently does not share this negative view of the marvellous as instructive of holiness. However, far from denying the continuation of the marvellous, Cassian

28 C&M 217, 229, 232-3, 248.

29 Cassian, *Inst.* Pref, (SC109) tr. Chadwick, *Cassian*, 51.

here affirms his own experience of marvels. He is concerned that focussing upon them should not obscure the path required of a monk desiring to achieve the holiness from which they proceed.<sup>30</sup> He does not reject them in any sense.

(c) The third influence is Gregory I:<sup>31</sup>

(i) In his discussion of diversity in the domain of souls, Gregory illustrates his thesis with reference to Paul's list of gifts of the Spirit in I Corinthians 12:

One man by faith commands the elements, but does not cure bodily sickness by the gift of healing; another removes disease by the aid of prayer but does not, by his word, bring down the rain to the thirsty earth. This man, by working of miracles, restores even the dead to the present life, and yet, not possessing the gift of prophecy does not know what will befall him tomorrow; another sees what is to come as though it were already present and yet does not reveal himself as a wonder-worker. One man, through the discerning of spirits, penetrates to the motives behind men's actions but does not possess the gift of tongues; another possesses the gift of tongues but does not discern the diverse motives which underlie similar behaviour; yet another, who knows only one language, wisely interprets the meanings of words [of Holy Scripture], while patiently bearing the lack of all the other gifts which he does not possess.<sup>32</sup>

Gregory's interest here is not the gifts themselves, rather in the roles of different individuals in a community of faith. However, I would concur with Meyvaert that he does seem to refer to their operation from the point of view of contemporary experience, i.e. he is not simply paraphrasing Paul, but is describing a phenomenon he has observed himself. The fact that the reference to the gifts is incidental to his main interest adds to the conclusion that Gregory knew of these gifts in operation in his day. Adomnán is, in contrast, happy to attribute many of the gifts as being administered by Columba. He seems to recognise a distribution at the point of need rather than the permanent possession of one or other spiritual ability.

b. The work Bede calls the *Libellus Responsionum* of Gregory I is addressed to his delegate Augustine of Canterbury.<sup>33</sup> In this, the commissioning bishop hears of

30 For Cassian only the monk who had achieved perfect holiness ought to go to the wilderness. (Chadwick, *Cassian* 54) see *Coll.* 15.6; 19.). Herein lies a question for Columba: did he know this advice as he left Ireland on his peregrination, i.e. did he believe he had achieved perfection, or was his peregrination not this Egyptian type of seeking desert solitude at all?

31 Now see McCready (1989), who asserts Gregory's continued belief in the historical veracity of modern miracles. Though in the modern, established church they are less prominent than in the mission situation, they are still needed for inner conversion. McCready (1994, 231). Gregory saw the miracles not as proving sainthood, but as proceeding from it.

32 Gregory I *Moralia* XXVIII.21 (PL76, 461), tr. Paul Meyvaert, 'Diversity within unity, a Gregorian Theme', chap. VI in: Meyvaert (1977) 147-8.

33 Meyvaert puts the case for the Gregorian authenticity. Bede himself, another otherwise 'respectable' scholar, is also critically accepting of the occurrence in his day of miracles. See

miracles being performed through his missionary. He warns him not to let this lead him into prideful arrogance, remembering the source of the power as God's grace, and that the gifts have been conferred not on him, but on the recipients of their benefits, for the purpose of leading them to faith in Christ:

I know, most beloved brother, that Almighty God, out of love for you has worked great miracles through you for the race which it was his will to have among the chosen. It is therefore necessary that you should rejoice with trembling over this heavenly gift and fear as you rejoice. You will rejoice because the souls of the English are drawn by outward miracles to inward grace...amidst those outward deeds which you perform through the Lord's power you should always judge your inner self carefully and carefully note within yourself what you are and how great is the grace shown to that people for whose conversion you have received the gift of working miracles...whatever power of working miracles you have received or shall receive, consider that these gifts have been conferred not on you, but on those for whose salvation they have been granted you.<sup>34</sup>

This letter is important for a number of reasons. First, it further confirms the existence of the expectation of and belief in the practice of miracles in the mind of the foremost influence on the church of the day. Secondly, he here describes them as marvellous, divinely empowered gifts. Thirdly, more could be expected, 'whatever power...you shall receive'. Fourthly, and most important to our discussion, Gregory is certain that the purpose of the miracles is to bring the English to faith; they are 'drawn by outward miracle to inward grace'; Augustine has 'received the gift of working miracles' for their 'conversion'; the gifts are conferred on those 'for whose salvation they have been granted' through Augustine. All this is referring to a period directly contemporary with Columba's own peregrination in The Provinces. While there is no direct and incontrovertible evidence that Columba himself was influenced by Gregorian missiological pneumatology, the discussion in appendix 2 on the Gregorian passages in the *VC* remove the chronological barrier to such influence. We can thus confirm another function of the marvellous in the *VC* being to draw the pagan Scots and Picts to faith. Furthermore, Bede's inclusion of this letter confirms his awareness of the place of the marvellous in the life of a missionary saint. His identification of Columba as such thus has Gregorian authority.

Thus Adomnán writes not only in a biblical tradition, and a hagiographical tradition, but also in the tradition of the writings of no lesser individuals than the Doctors of the

---

Mayvaert, 'Bede the Scholar', chap IX in: Meyvaert(1977)51-55.

34 Bede *H.E.* I.31.



Church,<sup>35</sup> and of other major ecclesiastics. It is not simply a literary tradition, promulgated by undeclared borrowing from the biblical record, but constitutes a record, albeit spasmodic and very incomplete, of the belief in and practical continuation of these pneumatic phenomena up to the sixth century. The many parallels not just in the Bible but also in the Fathers' writings both commenting on the scriptures, and more generally, show Adomnán to be fully in line with the thinking of the leading churchmen, perhaps the leading thinkers of his day with regard to the marvellous phenomena associated with the work of the Spirit. He is shown not to be writing merely in a rather fringe, extreme pietistic tradition with which hagiography later came to be identified, but writes in the main stream of the Christian tradition of his day, echoing the comments of his great teachers on the work of the Spirit in his own presentation of his more immediate patron.

ii. Originality: To return then to our first question, is there any reason to believe that Adomnán is doing anything other than aping his predecessors?

(a) VC includes various other characters who exercise some of the gifts. 18 incidents are detailed, 14 individuals are identified.<sup>36</sup> Brendan (of Birr) has a revelation of a pillar of fiery brightness and an apparition of angels accompanying Columba (iii3). The main point is to vindicate Columba and to present his closeness to heaven, but the person with the vision in this case is Brendan. He was Columba's senior, and may have been involved in his training. If Adomnán is not simply inventing, we might be observing the exercise of τὰ πνευματικά in the previous generation. Colmán mac Beógnai is depicted as being caught in the whirlpool of Corryvreckan. The main point of the story is Columba's gift of knowledge. However, it is Colman who, like Jesus in Luke 8, is prompted and 'raises both hands to heaven and blesses the troubled and very terrible sea' (i5). We're not told if he was successful, but he didn't die until 611(AU), and evidently joined the community (ii15) which he appears to have been on his way to do. Silnán delivers gifts of healings to the victims of the pestiferous cloud (ii4). This brings an interesting theological question: if healing comes from God, and Adomnán makes it clear that all of Columba's power is from God, was it Columba, who blessed the eulogiam, or Silnán, who applied the intiction, who communicated the gift of healing to the recipients? If the latter, then we have a further name to add to Adomnán's list of spiritually gifted sixth century Christians.

Other individuals include: Cainnech (d.600) who is described as having 'by revelation

35 Isidore was declared a 'Doctor of the Church' in 1722.

36 In addition to those named above: Diarmid, Berchán, Colgu, Brendan mocu Altí, Uinniau (Columba's master), Librán, Columba's Mother, his Foster-father Cruithnechán, and an anonymous 'spy'.

of the Holy Spirit heard in the inner ear of his heart' words of Columba in trouble at sea. He abandons his monks at their meal, and prays for the voyagers. Calm descended immediately. Adomnán explains that he believed the prayers of both the holy ones worked together in this 'so great miracle' (ii13). Baithéne, who would become second abbot in 597 knew about Columba's spirit meeting them (ii37); and we also read of him turning the whale away (ii19); Fergna (d.623), who became third abbot in 607/8, 'sees' heavenly light around Columba (iii19); Lugaid's vision is recorded as having been passed down in writing (iii23:131ab); and Ernène's vision, related in person to Adomnán (iii23:132a). The very nature of Adomnán's casual mentioning of their involvement is suggestive of a certain familiarity with such phenomena extant in Iona's tradition.

(b) Adomnán's account of Columba, while retaining elements of similarity with the *Lives* of Antony, Martin, Germanus, Benedict, is nevertheless possessed of its own character, analytical structure and emphases, and cannot be shown to be reliant on any single author for his terminology. He writes in the received currency of his tradition, a characteristic shared by all writers in all times. He finds common terminology and historical explanation for contemporary puzzling pneumatic phenomena. His emphases are distinctive, as is his often mentioned *taxis*. Athanasius gives particular attention to demonic encounter, rare in VC. Sulpicius Severus majors on healing, which forms only a small though significant rôle in VC. Gregory's account of Benedict, while providing some of Adomnán's interpretive understanding of the prophetic, reads far more as a random collection of tales with no discernible structure relating to analysis of the marvellous. Constantius attributes powerful preaching substantiated by healings, various miracles, and encounters with Pelagian and other opposing groups, to Germanus, who hardly moves in the prophetic, Adomnán's major category of the marvellous. Adomnán's uniqueness, firmly rooted in the catholic tradition, argues strongly for his working with a locally originated tradition concerning his own patron. It becomes less and less conceivable that his work is merely the product of eclectic borrowing from elsewhere, supplemented by occasional local tales, and local circumstantial detail. If we dismiss his marvellous tales as merely the product of inventive imagination, we must likewise dismiss the huge body of non-hagiographic evidence for the occurrence of these pneumatic phenomena in the life of the church. The only basis upon which this wholesale rewriting of the texts can be achieved is to apply a rigorously sceptic demythologising epistemology, and not a scrutiny of the evidence in its historical context.

Thus we come to the conclusion that Adomnán is operating firmly within the received

tradition of his ecclesiastical forbears. The marvellous in the VC have an eschatological, pneumatological and missiological nature and function.

#### *E. Columba the Ascetic Missionary*

The portrait Adomnán paints of Columba provides for his readers, ourselves included, a particularly vivid picture of one who has become transformed into the likeness of the Son (Rom 8.29). The picture is itself eschatologically significant as an example of the transformation that can occur in one who lives life in close communion with the Spirit of God. Thus he is a model to which men can aspire, acting, as it were, as a bridge to the perfect likeness of God revealed in Christ, Christ on whom Adomnán's Columba is so carefully fashioned. To put it another way, the likeness of Christ was recognised in the life of the holy one Columba. This is, as Sherry points out, a conventional understanding of sainthood, but it may go further. The second Vatican Council links holiness in the present saint with the future eschatological kingdom to which we are drawn, assisted by the image of the transformation in the saint:

When we look at the lives of those who have faithfully followed Christ, we are inspired with a new reason for seeking the city which is to come... In the lives of those who shared in our humanity and yet were transformed into especially successful images of Christ (cf. 2Cor3.18), God visibly manifests to men His presence and His face. He speaks to us in them, and gives us a sign of His kingdom to which we are powerfully drawn.<sup>37</sup>

Sherry notes a second connected function of the saint as one who demonstrates in his/her life that God's eschatologically oriented grace, salvation, donation of Spirit etc *has* happened, it is no mere theoretical possibility:

God really *has* redeemed, he really *has* poured out his Spirit, he really *has* done mighty things for sinners, he *has* let his light shine in the darkness.<sup>38</sup>

This would suggest a function of the VC as itself evangelistic in addition to recording evangelism; it proclaims the present salvation of God, as foretold in the Scripture, as demonstrated in the marvellously accompanied life of Columba. Here is evidence his pagan readers in Pictland (and elsewhere) might consider as they weigh the truth claims of the Ionan Christian Mission, cf.:

37 'Lumen Gentium (Constitution on the Church)' §50, in W. Abbott and J. Gallagher (eds), *The Documents of Vatican II* (London, 1966)82, cited in Sherry(1984)34. Sherry concludes that the continuous existence of saints in the history of the Christian faith is an important devotionally and philosophically. They provide reminders of Christ's likeness, of the transforming power of holiness anticipating the eschaton. They have an evidential role for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and for the reality of eschatological immortality.(83) He notes Michael Perham's comment (*Communion of Saints* [London 1980]48) on Luther and Calvin as quarreling 'with false saints and false honour to saints, not the idea that some men and women can be held up as special examples of the grace of God at work.'

38 Karl Rahner *Theological Investigations* III (London 1967)94, cited in Sherry(1984)35.

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2Corinthians 3.3).

In Isaiah 35, we have an eschatological vision of the blooming of the desert:

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God. (Isaiah 35:1-2).

We can almost see in this prophecy the outline plan for the whole of the VC: In our conventional understanding of Irish peregrination, the wilderness would be interpreted in the mind of the ascetic pilgrim as the ocean fastness where he/she sought solitude in which to live his/her holy life. The establishment of the monastery brings about the establishment of the Kingdom in that place; it blooms at that point, as it were. Adomnán's picture of the robe spreading out (iii.1) shows the spreading of monastic establishments connected with the mother house, and the monastic, ascetic kingdom is established following the intention of the promulgators. However, if we look closely at the picture Adomnán paints in this vision of the robe, and combine this with the evidence of the content of the stories he gathers to make his point, we see a more intricate picture emerging. The governing metaphor is of the Kingdom consisting in the flowering of faith. While it is true that many of the tales in the VC have an insular monastic location, Herbert's 'Iona stratum', and contain much circumstantial evidence of the life of these institutions, these almost all deal with the individual lives of people who interact with the monastery, or more specifically with its ministers, and whose lives are recorded as having changed as a result. (Here we must bear in mind Richard Sharpe's questioning of the monastic image historians hold in mind when thinking of these places: are we too heavily influenced by our extensive knowledge of the high medieval monasticism of a much later era than that which we are here considering.<sup>39</sup>) Sharpe(1992) is concerned to identify the pastoral ministry of the monasteries. He draws out similarities between these institutions and the minster churches of the Saxons whose mode of operation was the establishment of daughter houses, but whose objective, in spiritual terms at least, was the extension of, and care for, the community of faith. In other words, using the language of the gospels and of Adomnán, the object was the extension and nurture of the kingdom of God. Following this more missionary and pastorally active interpretation of the character of the sixth/seventh century Irish/Scottish church, we see that the wilderness may also be

39 Sharpe(1995) n367 mentions the tendency in past discussion of the spread of the Irish church 'to exaggerate the part played by monastic foundations over those established for pastoral reasons.'



taken as describing the people, in their geographical locale, who have yet to be reached with the gospel of salvation; the people in and amongst whom the Kingdom was yet to flower. Columba is seen as the one who, like Christ and the apostles in the New Testament, plants the seed of the gospel, and brings this kingdom into flower. As a result, the people rejoice. The process is definitely not restricted only to the members of the monasteries Adomnán mentions, indeed, the bringing of this eschatological joy is not described of them at all, but in contrast, it is the *laos*, those outside the *valla* who are so described. The splendour of God is seen in the signs of the marvellous manifestations of his power, working through his servant, which the people acknowledge, and of course it finds its most exquisite expression in the *shekinah* of God seen around the holy man. Again, though primarily reported as evident on Iona, this is not restricted to the island, but is also seen from far away (iii23). All of these signs of the presence of the Kingdom; converts; other marvellous manifestations; churches/monasteries are the flowers of many different colour to which the vision refers.

#### *F. Conclusion*

Thus we see Columba's peregrination into the wilderness as containing within its compass, if not as its major objective, a mission to establish the kingdom of God in the lives of the people of the region. The interpretation may be confirmed to a degree by the vision Jonas ascribes to the Irish missionary to continental Europe, Columbanus. He sees an image of the circle of the earth with desert spaces left for him to work in, and an angel commands him to go as he wills.<sup>40</sup> Now the kingdom of God in the gospels is not a geographical area of hegemony equivalent to the earthly kingdoms in which Jesus and the Apostles operated. Rather it is the rule of God as accepted and enacted in the lives of those who submit to its authority. Membership of the kingdom is dependant upon an acceptance of the authority and the ability of God to intervene in earthly affairs, and brings with it the promise and hope of the new creation when this rule will be perfectly established. Direct divine interventions in this age act as promisory signs of the Kingdom, and signs which are, as Turner puts it, concrete expressions, or actualizations of the direct, perfecting rule of God breaking in from the future new creation. In other words, and to change the metaphor, these are the first fruits of the new creation. In one sense these bring back the conditions of the original creation, where there was no desert wilderness:

God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that

---

<sup>40</sup> *Vita Columbani* i.27 (MGH SRM 4, p.104). Though Wood(1982)75 suggests Jonas was interpolating this missionary interest, R.A.Markus(1992)163 shows that the saint's disciples demonstrated mission in vigorous practice.

bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:12).

Greatly superceeding this sense however, the phenomena look forward to the perfect conditions of the new creation which is itself only imperfectly visualised in the pre-eschatological age. For Adomnán, then, the Kingdom spreads as faith-in-action spreads; either faith being placed in Christ in a conversion, or faith being exercised in God's present power to intervene. The converse, lack of faith, is wilderness: creation fallen from its creator's intention; Christians living without exercising faith in the omnipotence of the God of the promise of a perfected future. Further flowering occurs as pagans do accept the gospel in faith, and give glory to the 'God of the Christians'. Their faith breaks into flower in the desert of the wilderness, bringing joy, and blessing to the bearers, and, perhaps, to those with whom their new found faith is shared.

We thus see not a politicised preaching mission, as Martin or Patrick, but a mission after the pattern of the New Testament. The missionaries adopt the same commission (Lk.9, 10, 27, Mtt.28, Acts 1 etc), use the same methodology, and the same tools (1Cor.12 etc), and see very similar results. The process of establishing the kingdom, in which Adomnán presents Columba as being engaged during his peregrination, based as it is in the scriptural account of the establishment of the kingdom, is what a scriptural writer would understand as 'mission'. It is mission before the advent of the institutional church when mission became associated with the establishment of such institutions. Adomnán is not concerned with the latter, Tirechanian definition of mission. We have seen that he deems the biblical definition of mission to be central to his understanding of what Columba was engaged upon.

## Conclusion

The elements are now in place for us to trace a possible blueprint for Smith's alembic with which to distill the essence of sanctity in Adomnán's mind, and to draw conclusions as to the nature and function of the marvellous in his Life of Columba.

1. We see that far from being based in, or even significantly influenced by Irish pagan myth and saga, the Life is based on the canonical authority of Christian scripture either first hand, or as interpreted through the Fathers of the church. Herein are its motivations, models, means, and a substantial part of its imagery.
2. Behind the sharp foreground of the particular subject of Columba himself, the background of the work, in soft focus, is the establishment and demonstration of the presence of the Kingdom of God in Dalriada, Pictland and the Isles.
3. The eschatological Spirit is seen as the dynamic motivator, motivation, guide and empowerer, bringer of joy, new life, overcoming the conditions of a creation fallen away from the perfection of existence in union with the Creator; bringing things back into that relationship with healing, prosperity, joy.
4. The missiological gifts of the Spirit, utilized to such effect by Christ and his immediate disciples who pioneered the evangelisation of the world, are powerfully present.
5. The eschatologically oriented commission is seen to be clearly in action, and in the minds of the people into which we are probing, to be nearing its completion as the word of the Lord reaches the ends of the earth, and the last day thus approaches.
6. The word of God is proclaimed, heard, received, accepted by pagans of the area who thus enter into the heavenly kingdom.

The evidence of the marvellous in the VC points to the conclusion that this life intends to record the Spirit of the Risen Christ reaching close to the ends of the known earth at the climax of 6-700 years of the mission to establish the kingdom of God in all the earth. The fact that this feature of the life is implicitly captured as the spiritual stage upon which Columba acts makes the argument for its presence in Adomnán's thought the more cogent. This study has engaged in the task of learning to read Adomnán in a way which begins to have sympathy with what I have sought to discern as his own eschatological pneumatological missiological thought patterns and interpretive frameworks.

Adomnán is being revealed as one whose intimate knowledge of the scriptures is

profound. They form the thoughts and provide the imagery he expresses in his writings. It has become an imperative that in reading this *Life*, as in the Irish saga materials, and other early Irish literature, the reader must first come to know in detail, theologically, and in 'feel', the narrative which undergirds the thought world of those who wrote in these times: the Bible. That a major function of the *Life of Columba* has been shown to be not only the exegesis of scripture in abstract, but in practical terms consisting in its spiritual principles being outworked in tangible physical terms only serves to highlight this foundational axiom. Far from acting as a disqualifier of his genuineness, and as sign of inventive dissimulation, Adomnán's continual allusion to scripture is of profound importance to his purpose in associating Columba with orthodox Christian tradition. He not only wishes to show his patron's status as equivalent to his marvellously-accredited Irish, British and continental peers (or rivals, depending on one's perspective) but he wishes to show him as yet one more in the line of those in whom God is seen to reveal himself in transcendent reality. This line reaches back to the beginnings of history in the encounter of Moses with God. Columba is in this line. More even than this, in Columba's ministry, Adomnán sees the incarnation, the partial realisation or becoming tangibly present, of the promised kingdom of God in his own era and amongst his own people. He writes in an attempt to describe how this has come to pass. Constant allusion to scripture, in his context, can only add authority to his argument. To dismiss his case on account of this is to import into our assessment of his work a post enlightenment and thus anachronistic category by which he is judged and found wanting. He would no doubt have seen the want in modern epistemology.

We cannot hope to satisfy an historical question of occurrence; but we can and must consider the beliefs and understandings which drove the imagination of this author to produce such finely detailed accounts. Adomnán was not incapable of original and imaginative applications of the concepts which had become embedded in his thought. This seventh century Abbot took the concepts and expectations of the records of the early Christians, and applied them to his own interpretation of the stories associated with his beloved patron and hero.

We can thus see in the VC evidence for 7th century belief in the nature and function of the operation of the Spirit. Adomnán sees a rôle of the Spirit in the equipping and sending of the members of the church, the saints in a broad sense, to communicate in word and deed the gospel of the coming Kingdom. As we have variously reflected, one of Adomnán's unique contributions to this investigation is his division of the VC into the three books concerning prophecy, miracles and visions. In so doing he has



provided a snapshot of the view he held of this very activity of the Spirit in the ongoing mission of the church. It is from this missionary context that I am claiming he is making his report on Columba. In this he has the precedent of the great Augustine who gathered his libelli of miracles at the tomb of St Martin with the intention of convincing the pagan intelligencia of his day of the veracity of his faith. Thus we have in the VC a datum from which further investigation into the missiological activity of the Spirit can be viewed, and comparisons made.

Adomnán's *Life of Columba* forms for us who read it after the intervening ages a powerful record of the intricacies of belief in the marvellous phenomena it records. Here is no random imagination on record, but a way of thinking and believing which is deeply fashioned by the Christian tradition which it is the writers purpose to nurture. He presents himself, and his subject, as Christians fully conversant with, and expectant of the present reality of, a tradition of Christian practice as recorded in the canonical and patristic record. The evidence points us to the conclusion that for Adomnán, in his contemporary culture, these phenomena are both real, and to be expected, as the kingdom of God is promulgated. I began with the proposition that the knowledge of reality may not be the exclusive preserve of the latest philosophical fashion(s), and therefore that those who lived in earlier ages, with their own perception of reality, might profitably be called upon to contribute to the task of interpreting the nature of the universe in which we have all lived.

The question I hope to have opened up in this dissertation is less dogmatic than the assertion either of occurrence or of imaginative construction. It has much to do with the way we as readers approach such documentation. Adomnán was an intelligent, cognitive and articulate individual, operating within a highly educated community. He continued to assert, against definite sceptical questioning, the continuation in the sixth/seventh century of phenomena which were recorded in the origins of the faith many centuries before. Is it barely possible that the ancients had a grasp of reality which was wider and more inclusive than the moderns, a grasp of reality which reached beyond the material confines of present 'reality' into the eternal and infinite space which enfolds and indwells the material in which so much understandings is invested?

Adomnán leaves us the legacy of his interpretation of these phenomena which we in turn must interpret in order to gain understanding. On the basis of the evidence Adomnán records of the life of his predecessor, and in particular of the apologetic arguments into which he enters, it would not be unreasonable to suppose he might have had the

thought of Paul of Tarsus in mind as he wrote:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1Cor.2.14).

In the light of this 7th century abbot's view of the marvellous, we have illuminated the views and consequent methodologies of a community which was so instrumental in bringing the news of the holy man of Palestine to the Provinces of the Isles of the Ocean..

## Appendix 2: *The Gregorian borrowing*

We should perhaps detour to mention briefly the thesis of Anderson<sup>1</sup> and Sharpe who believe these silent uses of Gregory show Columba's reported explanation, and indeed 'the account to which they refer' were in fact derived from Gregory, and probably not derived from genuine Columban tradition. Anderson notes both that the reply in 10b adheres more closely to Gregory than does the text of 44b-45a, and that there is a discrepancy between the two VC passages in terms of suppliant. The former is composed 'somewhat later', and records a request made by more than one monk, with no pledge of secrecy. In 44ab, Lugbe as sole suppliant is asked to pledge secrecy unto Columba's death before explanation is commenced. Sharpe describes the source as 'St Benedict's words to Germanus',<sup>2</sup> and makes the point that 'Gregory's book, a late sixth-century account... was almost certainly not known on Iona until after St Columba's death.' He thus rejects the possibility that the explanation came from Columba's own words, or from a testimony of Lugbe given in the presence of others; rather, it must have derived from Adomnán's reading. Thus doubt is cast on Adomnán's claim to have used sworn witnesses.

Adomnán's use of Gregory need not necessarily evince unreliability in his claimed recording of testimonial evidence.

1. Date: a. The two individuals with whom the tale begins, and whose story provokes the question which Gregory is employed to answer, are Colmán Cú mac Ailéni and Rónán mac Áedo. They are said in the story to have died in the monastery of Cell Rois, in the territory of the Mugdorna.<sup>3</sup> The ruling dynasty of this territory in the 6th/7th century was that of Ailén, Colmán Cú's father. Ailén's other son Máel Dúin, Colmán Cú's brother, succeeded as king, and died in AU611. Ailén must thus have died before 611, and Colmán Cú must have been born before 611. Máel Dúin had a son. He must therefore have been of age before he died, a minimum of 15 years old. This gives a latest birth date of c. 596 for Máel Dúin. His son died in AU 665, 54

---

1 A&A(1961)p20, p204n6, p302n6; (1991)p18n17& p79n99.

2 Sharpe(1995)n189. The dialogue is, in fact, between Gregory and his diaconal interlocutor Peter in both loci. It concerns Benedict's vision of heavenly light, in which he saw the world 'gathered as it were together under one beam of the sun' and the soul of Germanus, Bp of Capua, being carried to heaven by angels, in a fiery globe. Gregory then explains this phenomenon to Peter, and returns to it again in a discourse on the visibility of a departing soul. Chapter iv.7 also gives a possible clue to the background of Columba's various sightings of departing souls in book iii; 'many of us, that by sincere faith and plentiful prayer, have had the eye of our souls purified, have often seen souls going out of their bodies...that by this means examples may satisfy our wavering and doubtful minds, which reason can not so fully persuade.

3 For genealogical and topographical information, see Anderson (1991)78-9, notes 97-98, and Sharpe(1995) note 188.

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1: Distribution of marvellous phenomena in the Vita Columbae.*

A close study of the VC reveals the following distributions of individual phenomena presented as occurring in Columba's lifetime, counting one for each individual manifestation, rather than chapters in which they occur. Counting such phenomena is not a simple task for a number of reasons. A single event may be variously described, but should properly only count as a single event e.g. i3 tells of Columba's discerning with spiritual sight the presence behind him of a boy touching his cloak. Should this be counted as Knowledge, Spiritual sight, Vision or Discernment? I have counted it as an example of a vision on the basis that spiritual sight may be seen to be the same phenomenon as spiritual vision, a more frequent description of such phenomena in the VC. As we have seen, Augustine asserts the existence of such inner vision. Similarly in iii3, Brendan sees fiery light accompanying Columba. This I have counted only as the phenomenon of light, regardless of how it is discerned. If it is a vision, it is a vision of light. If seen in the natural, with bodily eyes, it is the phenomenon of light. It should not count as both a vision, and as the phenomenon of light. In iii7, Adomnán says Columba has a vision over three nights of an angel visiting him. However, the angel leaves a physical sign of its presence. Is it then pure vision, or spiritual sight of a real angel present, or a miracle? Conversely, there are a number of events which do contain multiple types of phenomena operating nearly simultaneously, e.g. iii8 has two prophecies, two words of knowledge, appearances of angels and demons, and results in a deliverance.

These examples illustrate the subjectivity of a number of decisions that have to be made in turning literary accounts into statistical data. They also illustrate the dangers of trying to make the evidence go too far in terms of objective critical analysis. Other cases however are more objective, as in iii6 where Adomnán specifically infers that Columba sees the angel with his bodily eyes, though even here we might have conjectured that a spiritual vision is in progress. I here present the collated results in tabular and graphical form to illustrate the method. The prefaces and i1 are not included as these duplicate other recorded instances, with the exception of the posthumous miracles not recorded elsewhere. Non-specific manifestations, such as the healings noted in ii6 are not counted. 'Others' count those other individuals than Columba recorded as being the channel for a marvellous phenomenon.



Appendix 1a: *Marvels in VC Book I*

|          | Prophecy | Knowledge | Vision | Healing | Miracle | Vengeance | Angels | Light | Demons | Deliverance | Others | Posthum's | TOTS |
|----------|----------|-----------|--------|---------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|-------------|--------|-----------|------|
| Book One |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           |      |
| 1        |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        | 2         | 2    |
| 2        | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 3        | 3        |           | 1      |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 5    |
| 4        | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 5        | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 3    |
| 6        | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 7        | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 8        | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 9        | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 10       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 11       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 12       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 13       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 14       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 15       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 16       | 2        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 17       | 2        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 4    |
| 18       | 2        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 19       | 2        | 1         |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 5    |
| 20       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 21       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 22       | 2        | 2         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 4    |
| 23       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 24       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 25       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 26       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 27       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 28       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 29       |          | 1         | 1      |         |         |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 3    |
| 30       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 31       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 32       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 33       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 34       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 35       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       | 1      |             |        |           | 3    |
| 36       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 37       | 1        |           |        |         | 3       |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 5    |
| 38       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 39       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       | 1      |             |        |           | 2    |
| 40       |          | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 41       | 1        | 2         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 42       |          | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 43       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 44       |          | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 45       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 46       | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 47       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 48       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 49       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 50       |          | 3         |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| Tot.     | 51       | 28        | 2      | 0       | 4       | 0         | 1      | 0     | 2      | 0           | 5      | 2         | 95   |

Appendix 1b: *Marvels in VC Book II.*

| Book Two |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           |      |
|----------|----------|-----------|--------|---------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|-------------|--------|-----------|------|
|          | Prophecy | Knowledge | Vision | Healing | Miracle | Vengeance | Angels | Light | Demons | Deliverance | Others | Posthum's | TOTS |
| 1        |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 2        |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 3        | 1        | 1         |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 4        | 1        |           |        | 1       |         |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 3    |
| 5        | 1        | 1         |        | 1       |         |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 4    |
| 6        |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 0    |
| 7        |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 8        |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        | 1         | 1    |
| 9        |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        | 1         | 1    |
| 10       | 1        |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 11       |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       | 1      | 1           |        |           | 2    |
| 12       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 13       |          | 2         | 1      |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 5    |
| 14       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 15       |          | 1         |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 16       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       | 1      | 1           |        |           | 3    |
| 17       | 1        |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       | 1      |             |        |           | 3    |
| 18       |          |           |        | 1       |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 19       | 1        | 1         |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 20       | 2        |           |        |         |         | 1         |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 21       | 1        |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 22       | 1        |           |        |         | 1       | 1         |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 23       | 1        |           |        |         |         | 1         |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 24       | 1        |           |        |         |         | 1         |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 3    |
| 25       | 1        |           |        |         | 1       | 1         |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 26       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 27       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 28       | 1        |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 29       | 1        |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 30       | 1        |           |        | 1       |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 31       | 1        |           |        | 1       |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 32       |          |           |        | 1       |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 33       | 1        | 1         |        | 1       |         | 1         |        |       |        |             |        |           | 4    |
| 34       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       | 1      |             |        |           | 2    |
| 35       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 36       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 37       | 1        |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       | 1      |             |        |           | 3    |
| 38       | 1        | 1         |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 39       | 3        | 1         |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 6    |
| 40       | 1        | 1         |        | 1       |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 41       |          |           |        | 1       |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 42       | 2        | 2         |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 5    |
| 43       |          |           |        |         | 1       |           |        |       |        |             |        |           | 1    |
| 44       |          |           |        |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        | 1         | 2    |
| 45       |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        | 1         | 1    |
| 46       |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        | 1         | 1    |
|          | Prophecy | Knowledge | Vision | Healing | Miracle | Vengeance | Angels | Light | Demons | Deliverance | Others | Posthum's | TOTS |
| Tot.     | 26       | 12        | 1      | 9       | 26      | 6         | 1      | 0     | 5      | 2           | 5      | 5         | 98   |

Appendix 1c: *Marvels in VC Book III*

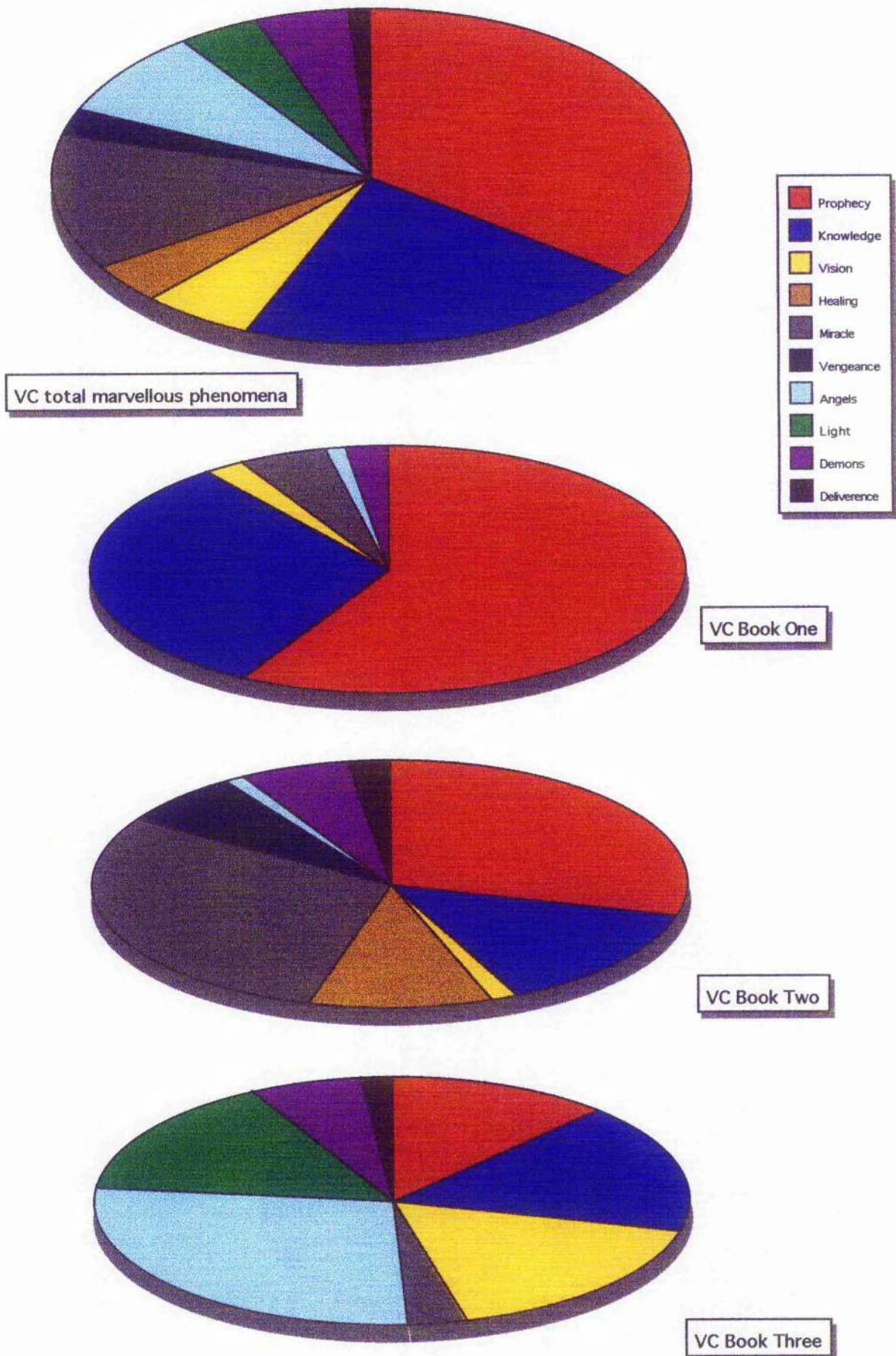
| Book Three |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           |      |
|------------|----------|-----------|--------|---------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|-------------|--------|-----------|------|
|            | Prophecy | Knowledge | Vision | Healing | Miracle | Vengeance | Angels | Light | Demons | Deliverance | Others | Posthum's | TOTS |
| Intro      |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           |      |
| 1          |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             | 1      |           | 1    |
| 2          |          |           |        |         |         |           |        | 1     |        |             | 1      |           | 2    |
| 3          | 1        |           |        |         |         |           | 1      | 1     |        |             | 1      |           | 4    |
| 4          |          |           |        |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             | 1      |           | 2    |
| 5          | 1        |           | 1      |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 6          |          |           |        |         |         |           | 1      |       | 1      |             |        |           | 2    |
| 7          |          |           | 1      |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 8          | 2        | 2         |        |         |         |           | 1      |       | 1      | 1           |        |           | 7    |
| 9          |          | 1         |        |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 10         |          |           | 2      |         |         |           | 2      |       | 1      |             |        |           | 5    |
| 11         |          |           | 1      |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 12         |          |           | 1      |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 2    |
| 13         |          |           | 2      |         |         |           | 1      |       | 1      |             |        |           | 4    |
| 14         |          | 1         | 1      |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 15         |          | 1         | 1      |         | 1       |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 4    |
| 16         |          | 1         |        |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             | 1      |           | 3    |
| 17         |          |           |        |         |         |           |        | 1     |        |             | 1      |           | 2    |
| 18         |          | 1         | 1      |         |         |           |        | 1     |        |             | 1      |           | 4    |
| 19         |          | 1         |        |         |         |           |        | 1     |        |             | 1      |           | 3    |
| 20         |          | 1         |        |         |         |           |        | 1     |        |             | 1      |           | 3    |
| 21         | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           |        | 1     |        |             | 1      |           | 4    |
| 22         | 1        | 1         |        |         |         |           | 1      |       |        |             |        |           | 3    |
| 23         | 2        |           |        |         | 1       |           | 2      | 3     |        |             | 3      |           | 11   |
| Tot.       | 8        | 11        | 11     | 0       | 2       | 0         | 18     | 10    | 4      | 1           | 13     | 0         | 78   |
| Summary    |          |           |        |         |         |           |        |       |        |             |        |           |      |
|            | Prophecy | Knowledge | Vision | Healing | Miracle | Vengeance | Angels | Light | Demons | Deliverance | Others | Posthum's | TOTS |
| (i)        | 51       | 28        | 2      | 0       | 4       | 0         | 1      | 0     | 2      | 0           | 5      | 2         | 95   |
| (ii)       | 26       | 12        | 1      | 9       | 26      | 6         | 1      | 0     | 5      | 2           | 5      | 5         | 98   |
| (iii)      | 8        | 11        | 11     | 0       | 2       | 0         | 18     | 10    | 4      | 1           | 13     | 0         | 78   |
| Tot.       | 85       | 51        | 14     | 9       | 32      | 6         | 20     | 10    | 11     | 3           | 23     | 7         | 271  |
| %          | 35.3     | 28.5      | 10.4   | 2.3     | 13.3    | 2.5       | 8.3    | 4.1   | 4.6    | 1.2         |        |           |      |

Percentage figures exclude posthumous miracles of Columba, and the numbers of 'others' with recorded marvels. Totals, an arbitrary figure, include all categories. It must be stressed that the scores recorded in these tables are somewhat subjective. The data is presented as a whole with the intention that the derivation of the various figures may be identified by comparison with a copy of the text of the VC. The method is thus corrigible, and may be transferred to other similar accounts of marvellous phenomena. Picard, Stancliffe and Davies each published sets of statistical data from the VC without this methodology, thus making following their study problematic. While I have not followed their methods in this thesis, the data above and below have been foundational in my interpretation of Adomnán's presentation, though consciously at the level of broad comparison rather than fine statistical analysis.

Further to this end, the data for all categories except those associated with individuals other than Columba, and his posthumous miracles, are presented graphically below. The graphs show at a glance the relative proportions of the various categories, without the rather false impressions that can come from numerical statistical analysis.



Fig. 1. Distribution of marvellous phenomena in the Life of Columba





## Appendix 2: *The Gregorian borrowing*

We should perhaps detour to mention briefly the thesis of Anderson<sup>1</sup> and Sharpe who believe these silent uses of Gregory show Columba's reported explanation, and indeed 'the account to which they refer' were in fact derived from Gregory, and probably not derived from genuine Columban tradition. Anderson notes both that the reply in 10b adheres more closely to Gregory than does the text of 44b-45a, and that there is a discrepancy between the two VC passages in terms of suppliant. The former is composed 'somewhat later', and records a request made by more than one monk, with no pledge of secrecy. In 44ab, Lugbe as sole suppliant is asked to pledge secrecy unto Columba's death before explanation is commenced. Sharpe describes the source as 'St Benedict's words to Germanus',<sup>2</sup> and makes the point that 'Gregory's book, a late sixth-century account... was almost certainly not known on Iona until after St Columba's death.' He thus rejects the possibility that the explanation came from Columba's own words, or from a testimony of Lugbe given in the presence of others; rather, it must have derived from Adomnán's reading. Thus doubt is cast on Adomnán's claim to have used sworn witnesses.

Adomnán's use of Gregory need not necessarily evince unreliability in his claimed recording of testimonial evidence.

1. Date: a. The two individuals with whom the tale begins, and whose story provokes the question which Gregory is employed to answer, are Colmán Cú mac Ailéni and Rónán mac Áedo. They are said in the story to have died in the monastery of Cell Rois, in the territory of the Mugdorna.<sup>3</sup> The ruling dynasty of this territory in the 6th/7th century was that of Ailén, Colmán Cú's father. Ailén's other son Máel Dúin, Colmán Cú's brother, succeeded as king, and died in AU611. Ailén must thus have died before 611, and Colmán Cú must have been born before 611. Máel Dúin had a son. He must therefore have been of age before he died, a minimum of 15 years old. This gives a latest birth date of c. 596 for Máel Dúin. His son died in AU 665, 54

---

1 A&A(1961)p20, p204n6, p302n6; (1991)p18n17& p79n99.

2 Sharpe(1995)n189. The dialogue is, in fact, between Gregory and his diaconal interlocutor Peter in both loci. It concerns Benedict's vision of heavenly light, in which he saw the world 'gathered as it were together under one beam of the sun' and the soul of Germanus, Bp of Capua, being carried to heaven by angels, in a fiery globe. Gregory then explains this phenomenon to Peter, and returns to it again in a discourse on the visibility of a departing soul. Chapter iv.7 also gives a possible clue to the background of Columba's various sightings of departing souls in book iii; 'many of us, that by sincere faith and plentiful prayer, have had the eye of our souls purified, have often seen souls going out of their bodies... that by this means examples may satisfy our wavering and doubtful minds, which reason can not so fully persuade.

3 For genealogical and topographical information, see Anderson (1991)78-9, notes 97-98, and Sharpe(1995) note 188.

years after his latest birth date of 611. If he lived to 70, his birth would have been in 595, pushing Máel Dúin's birth back to <580. It could conceivably have been as early as 550, making him 45 when his son could have been born. Colmán Cú, as son to Ailéni, must have been born before 611. Given his brothers conceivable dates, it is not impossible that he was a grown man who died before Columba's death. Rónán's father Áed mac Colgen died in AU 609. Sharpe says, 'It would appear that Rónán mac Áedo was killed during his father's lifetime.' i.e before 609. Again it is not impossible that he should have died before Columba [do we have dates for Colgen's death?]\*] Thus the circumstances of the tale could conceivably confirm its temporal place as during Columba's lifetime. At least there is no *prima facie* reason to doubt it.

b. Benedict died c.547. The Dialogues were written 593-4. It is thus firmly within the bounds of possibility that Benedict's repute, conveyed through Gregory's or other's oral sayings and teachings, reached Iona before the end of Columba's life. It is not impossible that the Dialogues themselves reached this far in the 3-4 years available, and were used by Columba to explain his visionary experiences to Luigbe. Adomnán cannot be accepted as firm evidence for this, so probability suggests Sharpe may be right to be suspicious. However, there is more to be said.

2. Adomnán was concerned to appeal to witnesses for his sources; it may well be that Adomnán's record is accurate of the report that reached him, but that the report itself was influenced by Gregory's explanation of Benedict's visionary gifting. Adomnán uses the words from Gregory on the lips of Columba, citing his disciple Luigbe as primary witness; Luigbe passed the explanation on via other holy ones to Adomnán. It would be perfectly understandable that any abbot coming into knowledge of the *Dialogues* could choose to adopt, or could unconsciously adopt, teaching from it as explanation, or even confirmation of the received tradition regarding Columba, then communicate this to his monks, so passing it into the narrative corpus of Ionan theology. Postulating the not unreasonable assumption that stories of Columba's prophetic gift were also a part of this corpus (as the *Amra* confirms), it is perfectly conceivable that Gregory's explanation could be incorporated with any explanation Columba himself had given. It is again not unreasonable that one of Columba's monks should beg such from him. It is also conceivable that Luigbe's memory of Columba's words, or that of the intermediaries between him and Adomnán, became structured by Gregory as the *Dialogues* were read over meals, or copied in the scriptorium.

3. Though Columba/Adomnán apparently did borrow from Gregory without citation, however this happened, this would be no more than he does with scriptural passages;

no more than standard practice in the era. Indeed it would be a tribute to adopt the explanation of one of the great teachers of the church. Did Adomnán have the *Dialogues* open before him as he composed, or was it a memorable phrase that had passed into Iona's own tradition? One possibility is that he may only have had book IV, where the explanation is simply concentrated on the phrases in question, though the context here is the seeing of souls, not revelations as in the VC *loci*. However Brining also showed that Adomnán uses other phrases from *Dialogues* I, II, & III, so this option is ruled out. Of one thing we can be certain. Adomnán saw this explanation as sufficiently important to his purpose that he selected and included it as one of the stories that the reader should know. Adomnán presents himself clearly as concerned to present a reliable body of tradition regarding his subject, and though he may be responsible for editing his account of Columba's explanation, in order to bring it into the currently fashionable style, the possibility of the Gregorian tutorial between Columba and Luigbe may not be rejected so easily..

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### *Primary Sources:*

- Adomnán, *Cáin Adamnáin: an old-Irish Treatise on the Law of Adamnán*, ed. K. Meyer (Oxford 1905), tr. G. Márkus(1997), *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents'*, (Glasgow: Blackfriars ).
- Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis*, ed.& tr. D.Meehan & L.Bieler(1958), (Dublin: *SLH* 3).
- Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae (VC)*, ed. W. Reeves (1857), *The Life of St Columba founder of Hy written by Adamnan* (Dublin: Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society).
- Adomnán, *VC*, ed.W.Reeves (1874), tr. A.P.Forbes, Bishop of Brechin, notes rev. W.F.Skene, *The Life of St Columba founder of Hy written by Adamnan*, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, The Historians of Scotland VI).
- Adomnán, *VC*, ed. J.T. Fowler(1894), *Adamnani Vita S. Columbae*, (Oxford 1894); tr. *Prophecies, Miracles, and Visions of St Columba [Columcille]* (London 1895).
- Adomnán, *VC*, tr. Wentworth Huyshe (1905), *The Life of Saint Columba (Columbkille) AD 521-597* (London: Routledge).
- Adomnán: *VC*, ed. J.T.Fowler (1920), *Adamnani Vita Columbae (ed. from Reeves) with an intro. on Early Irish Church History*, (New edition, revised) (Oxford).
- Adomnán: *VC*, ed.& tr. A.O. and M.O.Anderson (1961), *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, (Edinburgh).
- Adomnán, *VC*, ed.& tr. A.O. and M.O.Anderson, revised M.O.Anderson (1991), *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, (Clarendon, Oxford).
- Adomnán, *VC*, tr. Richard Sharpe (1995), *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth, Penguin).
- Altus Prosator*, ed.& tr. C&M(1995)44-53.
- Ambrose, *De Spirito Sancto*, *PL* 16. tr. *NPNF* II.X.
- Amra Choluimb Chille*, ed. & tr. Whitley Stokes(1899), *RC* 20, 31-35, 132-83, 248-89, 400-37; 21(1900)133-136. tr. C&M (1995)104-115.
- Amra Choluimb Chille*, ed.& tr. C&M(1995) 104-115.
- Annals of Clonmacnoise*: tr. Conell Mageoghagan, ed. Denis Murphy (Lampeter : Llanerch, 1993 Facsimile reprint of edition originally published: Dublin University Press, 1896).
- Annals of Inisfallen*: ed. & tr S.MacAirt (1951), *The Annals of Inisfallen*, (Dublin).
- Annals of Tigernach* (AD 489-766) ed.& tr. W. Stokes(1896), *RC* 17, 116-263.



- Annals of Ulster*, ed & trs S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (1983), *The Annals of Ulster* (Dublin).
- Antiphonary of Bangor*, ed. F. E. Warren (1893-95), 2vols (London: Harrison, Henry Bradshaw Soc.).
- Antony: *Life* by Athanasius, ed. G.M. Bartelink (1994), *SC* 400.
- Antony: *Life* by Athanasius, tr. from *PG* 26, 835-976, Robert C. Gregg (1980), *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, (London: SPCK).
- Antony: *Life* tr. Evagrius, *Vita Antonii*, *PL* 73, ed. G.J.M. Bartelink (1974) *Vite dei Santi*, I (Milan).
- Augustine, *Civitate Dei*, *CC* 47-8, 1955, tr. H. Bettenson (1972), *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Augustine, *Confessio*, *PL* 32.583-656, tr. F.J. Sheed (1943), (London).
- Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, *PL* 34.245f. tr. J. H. Taylor (1982) *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (Newman, Ancient Christian Writers vv.41-42).
- Basil, *Ascetic Works*, tr. W.K.L. Clarke (1925), *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*, (London: SPCK).
- Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. & tr. B. Colgrave & R.A.B. Mynors (1969), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History* (Oxford).
- Bieler, L. (1979), 'The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh', *SLH* 10 (Dublin).
- Brigit: Cogitosus, *Life of St Brigit*, ed. J. Bolland, *Acta Sanctorum*, Feb. I (Antwerp, 1658), tr. S. Connolly and J.-M. Picard (1987), *JRSAI* 117, 5-27.
- Brigit: First Life of S Brigit, ed & tr. Connolly, S. (1989), *JRSAI* 119, 5-49.
- Brigit: *Vita IV*, ed. R. Sharpe (1991), 'Vita IV S. Brigidae', *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, (Oxford).
- Cassian, J., *Conferences*, ed. E. Pichery (1955-9), *SC* 42, 54, 64; tr. (except 12 & 22) E.C. Gibson (1894), *NPNCF* XI (Oxford), and Colm Lubheid (1985), *John Cassian Conferences* (New York: Paulist) 1-3, 9-11, 14, 15, 18.
- Cath Finntrágha*: ed. K. Meyer (1885), *Cath Finntrágha (The Battle of Vintry)*, (Oxford: An. Oxon. Med. & Mod. ser. pt 4, ); ed. & tr. Cecile O'Rahilly (1962), *Cath Finntrágha*, (Dublin: Med. and Mod. Irish Ser. vol.20).
- Cath Maige Tuired*: ed. & tr. Whitley Stokes (1891), *Cath Maige Tuiredh (The Second Battle of Moytura)*, *RC* 12; ed. E.A. Gray (1982), *Cath Maige Tuired* (London: Irish Texts Soc. 52).
- Cath Maige Léna*: ed. & tr. Eugene Curry (1855), *Cath Mhuighe Léana* (Dublin: The Celtic Soc); ed. K.H. Jackson (1938), *Cath Maighe Léna* (Dublin: Inst. Med. and Mod. Series).

- Colgan, J.(1647), 'Triadis Thaumaturgae sev Divorum Patricii, Columbæ et Brigidæ... Acta' in: *Sacrae Hiberniae Antiquitates, Triadis Thaumaturgae Acta* (Lovanii).
- Columbanus: *Life*, Jonas, ed. Bruno Krusch (1905) *SRG* (Hannover: Hahn)1-294; tr. D.C.Munro(1895), (Philadelphia: Trs and & Reprs from the Orig. Sources Eur. Hist, 7).
- Combat of Cuchulaind with Senbecc*, ed. & tr. Kuno Meyer, *RC*6(1883-5)184.
- Cuthbert: *Anonymous Life*, and *Life by Bede*, ed. & tr. B.Colgrave, *The Two Lives of St. Cuthbert* (Cambridge).
- Da Choca's Hostel*, ed. & tr. Whitley Stokes (1900), *RC* 21.149-165, 312-327, 388-402.
- De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*, ed. G.McGinty, 'The Treatise De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae,' unpublished PhD diss, University College Dublin 1971.
- De Smedt, C. & De Backer, J., eds.(1887), *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae ex Codice Salmanticensis nunc primam integre edita* (Edinburgh and London, Bruges and Lille).
- Didache*, ed. & tr. J. Kleist (1948), *The Didache*, (Westminster).
- Dindsenchas*, 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas', ed.& tr. Whitley Stokes(1894 &5), *RC* 15 &16.
- Do Fogluim Chonculainn (The training of Cúchulainn)*, ed. & tr. Whitley Stokes(1908), *RC* 29.109-152.
- Eucherii Lugdunensis, *De Contemptu Mundi*, *PL*50.711-726.
- Eucherii Lugdunensis, *De Laude Eremitae*, *PL*50.701-712.
- Gantz, J.(tr.& ed.) (1981) *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Germanus of Auxerre: *Life* by Constantius of Lyons ed. W. Levinson (1920), *MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* VII, 247-283. Tr. F.R.Hoare (1954)284-320.
- Germanus: *Vita*, Fortunatus, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, 7(1919)337-418
- Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, ed. & tr. M. Winterbottom, (Chichester 1978).
- Gododdin*, trans. K.H.Jackson (1969), *The Gododdin: the oldest Scottish poem*, (Edinburgh).
- Gregory Nazianzen: *Oration XLI On Pentecost*, *PG* xxxv-xxxviii; tr. in *Post Nicene Christian Fathers* ser.II, vol vii (1894).
- Gregory of Tours, *Life of the Fathers* tr. E. James (1991), (2nd edn, Liverpool).
- Gregory the Great: *Dialogues*, ed. A.de Vogüé(1978-80), *SC* 260, 265.
- Gregory the Great: *Dialogues*, tr. from *PL*78, ed. E.G.Gardner (1911), *The Dialogues of Saint Gregory*, (London).

- Haddan, A.W. & Stubbs, W.(1878), *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents II.II: Church of Ireland*, (Oxford).
- Hilary of Arles: *Life*, ed. S.Carallin (1952), *Vitae Sanctorum Honorati et Hilarii Episcoporum Arelatensium* (Lund).
- Honoratus of Arles: *Life* by Hilary of Arles PL 50.1249-1272, tr: F.R.Hoare (1954)248-280.
- Immram Curaig Máel Dúin*, ed. & tr. H.P.A.Oskamp (1970), *Immram Curaig Máel Dúin (Voyage of Máel Dúin ) from the Yellow Book of Lecan*, (Groningen).
- Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin (The voyage of Mael Dúin's boat)*.ed. & tr. Whitley Stokes(1888), RC 9,447-495.
- Irish Liber Hymnorum*, ed. & tr. J. H. Bernard and R.Atkinson (1898), (London : Henry Bradshaw Society).
- Jackson, K.H.(1951), *A Celtic miscellany*, (London).
- James, M.R.(1975), *The Apocryphal New Testament* , (Clarendon, Oxford).
- Keating, Geoffrey, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn: The History of Ireland*, 4 vols (Irish Texts Soc. vols.IV 1902, VIII&IX 1908, XV 1914).
- Kentigern: *Life*, ed. & tr. A.P. Forbes (1874), *The Lives of Saint Ninian and St Kentigern*, (Edinburgh).
- Liber Armachanus*, ed. Gwynn, J.(1913), *The Book of Armagh* , (Dublin).
- Leinster, The Book of*, eds R.I.Best, O.Bergin, M.A.O'Brien and Anne O'Sullivan (Dublin: Inst Adv. Studs, 1954-1883).
- Martin: Sulpicius Severus, 'The Life of St Martin', tr. F.R.Hoare (1954)10-44.
- Martin: Sulpicius Severus, *Vie de Saint Martin, Introduction, texte et traduction [et] commentaire*, Jacques Fontaine (SC 5. 133-135, 1967-1969).
- Meyer, Kuno, ed.(1906), *Death Tales of the Ulster Heroes*, (RIA Todd Lecture Series).
- Meyer, Kuno, ed.(1911), *Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry*, (London).
- Murphy, G., ed.(1956), *Early Irish Lyrics*, (Clarendon, Oxford).
- Ninian: *Life*, ed. & tr. A.P. Forbes (1874), *The Lives of Saint Ninian and St Kentigern*, (Edinburgh).
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*, ed. H. Chadwick (Cambridge 1953).
- Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*: ed&tr. W.Stokes(1887) from Glenn Masain (*sic*) MS, 'The Death of the Sons of Uisnech' *Irische Texte* 2. 2, 109f; ed&tr. V.Hull(1949), *Loinges mac nUislenn* (London: OUP); ed.&tr. Caiomhfn Mac Giolla Léith(1993), *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* (London: Irish Texts Soc).
- Patrick: *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, ed. L.Bieler(1982), 'Libri epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi', 2vv, Irish Manuscripts Commission Dublin); tr. A.B.E. Hood, (1978), and D. Howlett (1994).

- Patrick: *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, ed.& tr. D.R.Howlett (1994), *Liber Epistolarum Sancti Patrici Episcopi, The Book of letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop*. (Dublin: Four Courts)47-93.
- Patrick: *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, tr. A.B.E.Hood (1978), *St. Patrick, His Writings and Muirchu's Life*. (London: Phillimore).
- Patrick: *Liber Angeli* , ed. & tr. L.Bieler(1979)184-191.
- Patrick: Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, ed.& tr. L. Bieler (1979)62-123.
- Patrick: Tírechán, *Collectanea*, ed.& tr. L. Bieler (1979)122-163.
- Samson of Dol: *Life*, ed. R. Fawtier (1912), (Paris: Bibl.de l'École des Hautes Études, 197), tr. T.Taylor(1925), *The Life of S Samson of Dol* (London: SPCK).
- Skene, W.F., ed.(1876), *Chronicles of the Picts: Chronicles of the Scots and other early memorials of Scottish history*, (Edinburgh).
- Stokes, W.(1890), *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, (Oxford).
- Táin Bó Cúalnge*, ed. & tr. Cecile O'Rahilly(1970), *Táin Bó Cúalnge from The Book of Leinster*, (Dublin).
- Tocmarc Monera (the Courtship of Monera)*, ed. & tr. Eugene Curry (1855), in: *Cath Muige Léana (The Battle of Magh Leana)* ed. & tr. Eugene Curry (Dublin)154-9.
- Vulgate: Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatem Versionem*, recensuit R. Weber, 2vv (Stuttgart 1969).

#### *Secondary Sources:*

- Aigrain, René (1953) *L'Hagiographie* (Paris).
- Aird, W.M.(1992), 'The Making of a Medieval Miracle Collection: the Liber de Translationibus et Miraculis Sancti Cuthberti', *Northern History*, XXVIII, 1-24.
- Alcock, L.(1971), *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367-634* (London).
- Allchin, A.M.(1994), Celtic Christianity: Fact or Fantasy? in: *Epiphany* 14.3, pp17-29 .
- Anderson, A.O., ed.(1990), *Early Sources of Scottish History AD 500-1286*, (2vols Edinburgh 1922, repr.1990).
- 223Kingship in Early Scotland*, (Edinburgh).
- Ash, J.L.(1976), 'The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church,' *Theological Studies* 37, 227-252.
- Bannerman, J.(1974), *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, (Edinburgh).
- Berger, Peter L.(1969), *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Bieler, L.(1949), *The Life and Legend of Saint Patrick: problems of modern scholarship* (Dublin).



- Bieler, L.(1962), 'The Celtic Hagiographer', *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur (Studia Patristica)* 5, 243-265.
- Bieler, L.(1986), *Studies in the Life and Legend of St Patrick*, ed. R.Sharpe (London: Variorum Reprints).
- Bieler, L.(1987) *Ireland and the culture of Early Medieval Europe* ed. R. Sharpe (London: Variorum Reprints).
- Binchy, D.A.(1962), 'Patrick and his Biographers: Ancient and Modern', *Studia Hibernica*, 2, 7-173.
- Binchy, D.A.(1982) 'A pre-Christian survival in medieval Irish hagiography' in: D.Whitelock et al.(1982)165-178.
- Blair, J.& Sharpe, R., eds (1992), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press).
- Bonser, W.(1957), *An Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Bibliography; 453-1087*, (Oxford).
- Borsje, J.(1994), 'The monster in the river Ness in *Vita Sancti Columbae*: the study of a miracle' *Peritia* 8, 27-34.
- Bourke, Cormac, ed.(1997), *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba* (Dublin: Four Courts Press).
- Bowen, E.G.(1977), *Saints, Seaways and Settlements* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).
- Bradley, Ian C.(1993), *The Celtic Way*, (London: DLT).
- Bradley, Ian C.(1996), *Columba : pilgrim and penitent 597-1997* (Glasgow: Wild Goose).
- Bradshaw, B.(1989), 'The Wild and Woolly West: Early Irish Christianity and Latin Orthodoxy', in: *The Churches, Ireland and the Irish*, ed. W. Shiels and D. Wood (1989).
- Bray, D.A.(1992), *A List of Motifs in the Lives of Early Irish Saints* (Folklore Fellows Communications, no. 252. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica).
- Brewer, C.K.(1897), *A Dictionary of Miracles* (1897 repr.1966).
- Brown, Colin (1988), *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
- Brown, Colin (1971), *Philosophy and Christian Faith*, (London: Tyndale).
- Brown, Colin, ed.(1978), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster).
- Brown, P.(1971), 'The Rise and function of the Holy Man in Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies* 61, 80-101.
- Brown, P.(1981), *The cult of the Saints. Its rise and function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago).
- Brown, P.(1983), 'The Saint as exemplar in Late antiquity', *Representations*, 1.2, 1-25.

- Brüning, G.(1916), *Adamnans Vita Columbae und ihre ableitungen* (Halle).
- Bullough, D.A.(1964-5), 'Columba, Adomnán and the achievement of Iona'. *Scottish Historical Review* 43 (1963-4), 111-130 and (1964-5)17-33.
- Butler, E.C.(1910), 'Review of *Vita Sanctorum Hiberniae*', *JTS*, 12, 490-2.
- Byrne, F.J.(1965), 'The Ireland of St Columba', *Historical Studies* (Dublin) 5, 37-58.
- Byrne, F.J.(1971), 'Senchas: The Nature of Gaelic Historical Tradition', *Historical Studies* 9, 137-159.
- Cameron, Averil (1991), *Christianity and the rhetoric of empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Carey, J.(1998), *King of Mysteries* (Dublin: Four Courts Press).
- Carney, James (1955), *Studies in Irish Literature and History*, (Dublin: Inst. Adv. Studs).
- Carney, James, (1983), 'Early Irish Literature - the state of Research in: *Proc. 6th Int. Congress of Celtic Studies* (Dublin 1983) 113-130.
- Chadwick, H.M.(1949), *Early Scotland: the Picts, the Scots and the Welsh of Southern Scotland* (Cambridge).
- Chadwick, Henry(1981), *Frontiers of Theology- Inaugural Lecture, Univ. Camb. 5th March 1981* (Cambridge).
- Chadwick, N.K.(1955), *Poetry and Letters in Early Christian Gaul* (London: Bower and Bower).
- Chadwick, N.K.(1961), *The Age of Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (Cambridge).
- Chadwick, N.K.(1970), *The Celts* (Harmondsworth).
- Chadwick, N.K.(1973), *Celtic Britain* (London).
- Chadwick, N.K.(1976), *The British Heroic age: the Welsh and the Men of the North* (Cardiff).
- Chadwick, N.K., ed.(1958), *Studies in Early British Church* (Cambridge).
- Chadwick, N.K., ed.(1963), *Celt & Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, (Cambridge).
- Chadwick, Owen (1968), *John Cassian* (Cambridge: Universtiy Press).
- Charles-Edwards, T.M.(1976) 'The Social Background to Irish peregrinatio', *Celtica* 11, 43-59.
- Childe, V.G.(1935), *The Prehistory of Scotland* (London).
- Clancy, T.O. & Márkus, G.(1995), *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh University Press).
- Clancy, T.O.(1995b), 'Review' of Heffernan(1988), *Innes Review*, 46.2, 165-168.
- Clancy, T.O.(1997), 'Columba, Adomnán, and the cult of saints in Scotland' *Innes Review* 48.1(Spring 1997).

- Congar Yves M.J.(1983), *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, tr. David Smith, 3 vols, (London: Seabury).
- Connolly, S.(1995), 'The Power motif and the use of scripture in Cogitosus' *Vita Brigidae*' in: Picard, J.M.(ed), *Aquitaine and Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Blackrock)207-220.
- Corish, P.J.(1972) *The Christian Mission* (Dublin).
- Cowan E.J.(1984), 'Myth and Identity in Early Medieval Scotland', in: *SHR* 63 (October 1984), 111-135.
- Cowan, I.B., and Casson, D.E.(1976), *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland* (London).
- Crehan, J. H.(1979), 'The Theology of Eucharistic consecration: the role of Priest in Celtic literature' in: *Theol. Studs.* 40 (June, 1979), 334-343.
- Cruden, S.H.(1964), *The Early Christian and Pictish Monuments of Scotland* (Edinburgh).
- Culling, E.(1993), *What is Celtic Christianity?* (Grove Spirituality No.45).
- Davies, O. & Bowie, F.(1995), *Celtic Christian Spirituality* (SPCK London).
- Davies, O.(1994), 'Celtic Christianity' in: *Epiphany* 14.3, 7-16.
- Davies, W.(1982), *Wales in the early Middle Ages* (Leicester).
- Davies, W.(1989), 'The Place of Healing in Early Irish Society' in: Ó Corráin(1989)43-55.
- Davies, W.(1992), 'The Myth of the Celtic Church' in: *The Early Church in Wales*, (eds) N. Edwards & A. Lane, 12-21. (Oxford).
- De Waal, E.(1988), *The Celtic Vision* (London: DLT).
- Delehaye, H.(1905), *Les Legendes Hagiographiques*, SHG18 (Brussels), (tr. V.M. Crawford, *The Legend of the Saints*, Longmans London 1907).
- Delehaye, H.(1910), 'Les premiers "libelli miraculorum"' *Analecta Bollandiana* 19, 427-434.
- Delehaye, H.(1934), *Cinq leçons sur la méthode hagiographique* (Brussels).
- Derouet, J.-L.(1976), 'Les Possibilités d'interprétation sémiologique des textes hagiographiques', *RHEF* 62.153-162.
- Dillon, Myles (1948), *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago).
- Dillon, Myles, & Chadwick, N.K.(1972), *The Celtic Realms* ( 2nd ed. London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson).
- Dodd, B.E. & Heritage, T.C.(1966), *The Early Christians in Britain* (Longmans, London).
- Doherty, C.(1987), 'The Irish Hagiographer: resources, aims, results', in: *The writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence*, ed. T. Dunne, *Historical Studies*, 16 (Cork), 10-22.

- Dubois, J. & Lemaitre, J.-L.(1993), *Sources & Méthodes de L'Hagiographie Médiévale*, (Les éditions du Cerf, Paris 1993).
- Dumville, D.N.(1977), 'On the Northern British section of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Welsh Historical Review* viii, 345-354.
- Dumville, D.N.(1981), 'Beowulf & the Celtic World: the uses of evidence' in: *Traditio* 37, 109-160.
- Dumville, D.N., ed.(1993), *Saint Patrick AD 493- 1993* (Woodbridge: Boydell).
- Dumville, D.N.(1996), Review of McCone(1990), *Peritia* 10, 389-398.
- Duncan, A.A.M.(1975), *Scotland: the Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh).
- Duncan, A.A.M.(1981), 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', in: *The writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford)1-42.
- Fee, G.D.(1991), *Gospel and Spirit, Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*, (Peabody: Hendrickson).
- Fee, G.D.(1994), *God's Empowering Presence (The Spirit in Paul)* (Peabody: Hendrickson).
- Finlay, W.I.R.(1979), *Columba*, (London).
- Fontaine, J. & J.N. Hillgarth, eds (1992), *The Seventh Century: Change and Continuity* (London: Warburg Inst.).
- Frost, Evelyn (1940), *Christian Healing: A Consideration of the Place of Spiritual Healing in the Church of To-day in the Light of the Doctrine and Practice of the Ante-Nicene Church* (London).
- Gilley, S.(1995), 'The British Isles: Recent Developments in the Writing of Church History.' in: *Annuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 4, 21ff.
- Gougaud, L.(1932), *Christianity in Celtic Lands*, 2nd Ed., tr. M.Joynt (London)
- Grant, R.(1952), *Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-roman and Early Christian Thought*, (Amsterdam).
- Grégoire, Réginald(1987), *Manuale di agiologia: Introduzione alla letteratura agiografica* (Fabriano: monastero San Silvestro Abate).
- Grimm, Jacob (1882), *Märchen*, 4vv., tr. James S. Stallybrass (London: George Bell).
- Grogan, Brian (1976) 'Eschatological teaching in the early Irish church', in: Martin McNamara(ed), *Biblical Studies: the medieval Irish contribution* (Dublin)46-58.
- Grosjean, P.(1957), 'Notes d'hagiographie celtique (nos.37-40)', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 75, 373-419.
- Gwynn, E.J.(1912), 'Review of *Vita Sanctorum Hiberniae*' *ChQR*, 74, 62-81.
- Hanson, R.P.C.(1959), *Allegory and Event* (London: SCM).
- Hanson, R.P.C.(1968), *Saint Patrick: His Origin and Career* (Oxford).



- Hanson, R.P.C.(1983), *The Life and writings of the Historical St.Patrick* (Oxford).
- Hanson, R.P.C.(1989), 'The Mission of St Patrick', in: Mackey(1989)22-44.
- Hardinge, L.(1972) *The Celtic Church in Britain* (London: SPCK)
- Hardon, J.A.(1954), 'The concept of Miracle from St Augustine to Modern Apologetics', *Theological Studies* 15, 229-257.
- Harrison, K.(1976), *The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History to 900* (Cambridge).
- Heffernan, T.J.(1988), *Sacred Biography* (Oxford).
- Heist, W.H.(1981), 'Hagiography, chiefly Celtic' in: *Hagiographic Cultures and Societies*, F. Dolbeau (Paris).
- Henderson, I.M.(1967), *The Picts*, (London).
- Henry, F.(1965), *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period to 800AD* (London revised edn).
- Herbert, M.(1988a), *Iona, Kells, and Derry. The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988).
- Herbert, M.(1988b), 'The Bible in early Iona' in: *The Bible in Scottish life and literature* ed. D.F. Wright (St Andrew Press, Edinburgh 1988).
- Herbert, M.(1996), 'Hagiography' in: McCone & Sims(1996)79-90.
- Hillgarth, J.N.(1986), *Christianity and paganism, 350-750: the conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Hillgarth, J.N.(1987), 'Modes of evangelization of Western Europe in the seventh century', in: Ní Chatháin & Richter (1987)311-331.
- Hillgarth, J.N.(1992), 'Eschatological and Political Concepts in the Seventh Century' in: Fontaine and Hillgarth (1992)212-235.
- Hudson, B.T. & Zeigler, J., eds (1991), *Crossed Paths: Methodological approaches to Celtic aspects of Early Middle Ages History* (Universities of America Press).
- Hughes, K.(1965), 'The Celtic Church and the Papacy', in: *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, ed.C.H.Lawrence (London).
- Hughes, K.(1966), *The Church in Early Irish Society*, (London).
- Hughes, K.(1970), 'Early Christianity in Pictland' (Jarrow Lecture 1970) repr. in: *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. D.Dumville (Woodbridge 1980) 38-52.
- Hughes, K.(1972), *Early Christian Ireland* (London).
- Hughes, K.(1972), *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (The Sources of History, Hodder and Stoughton).
- Hughes, K.(1977), *The Early Celtic Idea of History and the Modern Historian* (Cambridge).
- Hughes, K.(1980), *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle ages: Studies in Welsh and Scottish sources*, ed. D. Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell)

- Hughes, K.(1981), 'The Celtic Church: is this a valid concept?' in: *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, I, 1-20.
- Hughes, K.W. & Hamlin, A. (1977), *The Modern Traveller to the Early Irish Church* (London).
- Hull, J.M.(1974), *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd series no.28 (London: SCM).
- Jackson, K. H.(1964), *The Oldest Irish Tradition* (Cambridge)44f.
- Jackson, K.H.(1955), 'The Britons in Southern Scotland', *Antiquity* xxxix, 77-88.
- Jackson, K.H.(1963), *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh repr.).
- Jackson, K.H.(1964), *The oldest Irish tradition* (Cambridge).
- Jackson, K.H., ed.(1964), *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border* (Cambridge).
- Jones, G.H.(1936), 'Primitive Magic in the Lives of the Celtic Saints.' *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion* 1936, 69-96.
- Kantzer, K.S.(1990), 'The Holy Spirit: God at work, Christianity Today Institute, J. Wimber, J.I. Packer et al' *Christianity Today* 34, 27-35.
- Kee, H.C.(1983), *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven).
- Kelsey, M.T.(1968), *Tongue Speaking: an experiment in spiritual experience* (London: Hodder & Stoughton).
- Kelsey, M.T.(1973), *Healing and Christianity* (London: SCM).
- Kenney, J.F.(1968), *The sources for the early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical*, 2nd edition, (Dublin: Four Courts 1968, repr. 1993).
- Kolenkow, A.B.(1976), 'A problem of power: how miracle doers counter charges of magic in the hellenistic world', in: G.MacRae (ed.), *SBL 1976 Seminar Papers* (Missoula: Scholars Press)105-110.
- Kydd, Ronald A.N.(1973), *Charismata to 320 A.D: A Study of the Overt Pneumatic Experience of the Early Church* PhD thesis, (University of St Andrews), (publ. Kydd 1984).
- Kydd, Ronald A.N.(1984), *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson).
- Ladd, George Eldon (1974), *The presence of the future : the eschatology of biblical realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
- Ladd, George Eldon (1975), *A Theology of the New Testament* (Lutterworth).
- Laing, Ll.(1975), *The Archaeology of Late Celtic Britain 400-1200* (London).
- Laing, Ll.(1979), *Celtic Britain 400-1000* (London).
- Laing, Ll.(1990), *Celtic Britain & Ireland AD200-800: The myth of the Dark Ages*. (Dublin).

- Lampe, G.W.H.(1961), *A Patristic Greek Lexikon*, (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Lapidge, M. & Dumville, D.(1984), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge).
- Lapidge, M. & Sharpe, R., eds (1985), *A Bibliography of Celtic Latin Literature 400-1200* (Dublin).
- Latourelle, R.(1988), *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles* (New York: Paulist)
- Lawrence, C.H.(1989), *Medieval Monasticism*, 2nd ed., (London: Longman).
- Leeds, E.T.(1933), *Celtic ornament in the British Isles down to AD700* (Oxford).
- MacCulloch, J.A.(1911), *The Religion of the Ancient Celts* (Constable).
- MacDonald, Aidan (1984) 'Aspects of the monastery and monastic life in Adomnán's Life of Columba', *Peritia* 3, 271-302.
- MacDonald, Aidan (1995) 'A fruit tree at Durrow', *Hallel* 20, 10-14.
- MacDonald, Aidan (1997) 'Adomnán's Monastery of Iona' in: Cormac Bourke (ed), *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997)24-44.
- MacGinty, Gerard (1996), 'The Irish Augustine: *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*' in P.Ní Chatháin and M Richter (1987)70-83.
- MacInnes, John (1982), 'Religion in Gaelic Society', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, LII.
- Mackey, J. P.(1989), *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark).
- MacNeill, E.(1928), 'The Earliest Lives of St Patrick', *JRSAI* 58, 1-21.
- Macquarrie, A.(1994), *Medieval Scotland Corpus Christianorum: Hagiographies I* ed. G.Philippart, (Belg), 487-501.
- Macquarrie, Alan (1997), *The saints of Scotland : Essays in Scottish Church history, AD 450-1093* (Edinburgh : John Donald).
- MacQueen, J.(1961), *St Nynia: a Study of Literary and Linguistic Evidence* (Edinburgh).
- MacQueen, J.(1962), 'History and miracle Stories in the biography of Nynia', *Innes Review*, xiii, 115-29.
- MacQueen, J.(1989), 'The Saint as Seer; Adomnán's account of Columba', in: H.E.Davidson, *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions*, (Edinburgh: John Donald)37-51.
- Markus, R.A.(1970), 'Gregory the Great and a Papal Missionary Strategy,' *SCH*(50) 6: 29-38.
- Markus, R.A.(1985), 'The Sacred and Secular: from Augustine to Gregory the Great', *JTS*, 36.84-96.
- Markus, R.A.(1992), 'From Caesarius to Boniface: Christianity and Paganism in Gaul', in: Fontaine and Hillgarth(1992), 154-167.

- Marshall, I.H.(1977), *I believe in the Historical Jesus*, (London : Hodder and Stoughton).
- Mayr-Harting, H.(1972), *The coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, (London).
- McCone, K.(1984), 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints Lives', *The Maynooth Review* 11, 26-59.
- McCone, K.(1989), 'Tale of Two Ditties: poet and satirist in *Cath Maige Tuired*', in Ó Corrain *et al.* (1989)122-43.
- McCone, K.(1990), *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, (Maynooth: An Sagart).
- McCone, K. & Sims, K., eds (1996), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth: Dept Old Irish Studs).
- McCormick, Finbar (1997) 'Iona: The Archaeology of the Early Monastery' in: Bourke(1997)45-68.
- McCready, W.D.(1989), *Signs of sanctity. Miracles in the Thought of Gregory the Great* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts 91).
- McCready, W.D.(1994), *Miracles and the Venerable Bede* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts 118).
- McNamara, Martin (1975), *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church*, (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies).
- McNamara, Martin (1987), 'The Text of the Latin Bible in the early Irish Church' in: Ní Chatáin & Richter (1987)7-55.
- McNaught, J.C.(1927), *The Celtic Church & the See of Peter* (Blackwell, Oxford).
- McNeill, P. & Nicholson, R.eds (1975), *An Historical Atlas of Scotland c400-c1600*, (St Andrews).
- Meckler, M.(1990), 'Colum Cille's ordination of Aedán mac Gabráin.' *Innes Review* 41.2, 139-150.
- Meek, D.(1991), 'Celtic Christianity: What is it, and when was it?': Review of Mackey(1989), in: *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9, 13-21.
- Meek, D.(1992), 'The Modern Celtic Church: the Contemporary Revival and its Roots,' in: *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 10.1, 6-13.
- Meek, D.(1997), 'Surveying the Saints: Reflections on recent writings in 'Celtic Christianity', in: *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 15.1(Spring 1997), 50-60.
- Meyvaert, P., ed.(1977), *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and others*. (London: Variorum Reprints).
- Migne, J.P., *Index de Miraculis* PL 219.332-362.
- Moltmann, J.(1975), *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes*, tr. Margaret Kohl, *The Church in the power of the Spirit* (London: SCM 1977).



- Moody, T. W., F. X. Martin, & F. J. Byrne, eds (1982), *A new history of Ireland: 8; A chronology of Irish history to 1976 : a companion to Irish history*, part 1, (Oxford : Clarendon).
- Murphy, Gerard (1955), *Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland* (Dublin).
- Moule, C.F.D., ed. (1965), *Miracles* (London: Mowbray).
- Ní Chatháin, P. & Richter, M., eds (1987), *Ireland and Christendom. The Bible and the missions*, (Stuttgart).
- Noble, T.F.X. & Head, T., eds (1994), *Soldiers of the Christ; Saints and saints' lives from late antiquity and the early middle ages*, (London).
- Ó Briain, Felim (1944), 'Irish Hagiography: Historiography and Method' in: Sylvester O'Brien (ed), *Measgra i gCuimhne Mhichíl Uí Chléirigh*, (Dublin, 1944) 119-131.
- Ó Briain, Felim (1945), 'Miracles in the Lives of the Irish Saints', *Irish Eccles.Rec.* 5th Ser. 66, 331-342.
- Ó Briain, Felim (1947), 'Saga Themes in Irish Hagiography', in: *Féilscribhinn.Torna: Essays presented to Tadhg Ua Donnchadha*, ed. S.Pender (Cork) 33-42.
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás (1996), 'Early Irish Narrative Literature' in: K. McCone and K. Sims (1996) 55-64.
- Ó Concheanain, Tomás Ó, 'Textual and historical associations of *Leabhar na hUidre*', *Éigse* 29: 65-120.
- Ó Corrain, D. (1983), 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative', in: *Proc. Seventh Int. Cong. Celtic Studs, Oxford*, ed. D.E.Evans et al., (Oxford 1986), 141-158.
- Ó Corrain, D., L. Breatnach, & K. McCone, eds (1989), *Sages Saints and Storytellers; Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth).
- Ó Riain, P. (1982), 'Towards a methodology in early Irish hagiography,' *Peritia* 1, 146-159.
- O'Flaherty, R. (1846), *A Chronographic description of Iar or West Connaught*, ed. James Hardiman, (Dublin 1846), (first publ. 1684).
- Ó Floinn, R. (1997) 'Insignia Columbae I' in: Bourke (1997) 136-161.
- Ó Laoghaire, D. (1979), 'Daily Intimacy with God: an ever new aspect of Celtic Worship' in: *Studia Liturgica* 13, 1
- O'Laoghaire, D. (1986), 'Celtic Spirituality' in: Jones & Wainwright (eds), *The Study of Spirituality*, (London).
- O'Loughlin, T. (1992), 'The exegetical purpose of Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*' *CMCS* 24, 37-53.
- O'Loughlin, T. (1994a), 'The library of Iona in the late seventh century: the evidence from Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*.' *Ériu* 45, 33-52.

- O'Loughlin, T.(1994b), 'The Latin version of the Scriptures in use in Iona in the late seventh century: the evidence from Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*' *Peritia* 8, 18-26.
- O'Loughlin, T.(1995), 'Adomnán the Illustrious.' *Innes Review* 46, 1-14.
- O'Loughlin, T.(1997), 'Living in the Ocean', in: Bourke(1997)11-23.
- O'Loughlin, T.(1997b), 'Res, tempus, locus, persona: Adomnán's exegetical method.' *Innes Review* 48.2, 95-111.
- O'Rahilly, T.F.(1946), *Early Irish History and Mythology*, (Dublin).
- O'Reilly, Jennifer (1995), 'Exegesis and the Book of Kells: the Lucan Genealogy', in: *The Book of Kells, Proc. Conf. T.C.D.6-9 Sept. 1992*, (Dublin, Scholar)344-397.
- O'Reilly, Jennifer (1997), 'Reading the Scriptures in the Life of Columba', in: Bourke(1997)80-106.
- O'Sullivan, Sean (1966), *The Folktales of Ireland*, (London).
- Opsahl, Paul D., ed.(1978), *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg).
- Parker, P.(1976), 'Early Christianity as a religion of healing' in: *St Luke's Journal of Theology* 19, 142-150.
- Pearce, S.M.(1982), 'The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland', *BAR* 102 (Oxford).
- Petersen, Joan (1984), *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in their late antique cultural background*, (Toronto: Pontifical Inst. Mediev. Studs).
- Picard, Jean-Michel (1981), 'The Marvellous in the Irish and Continental Saints living in the Merovingian Period', *BAR Int'l Series* 113, 91-104.
- Picard, Jean-Michel (1982a), 'The Purpose of Adomnán's *Vitae Columbae*', *Peritia* 1, 160-177.
- Picard, Jean-Michel (1982b), 'The Schaffhausen Adomnán: a Unique Witness to Hiberno-Latin', *Peritia* 1, 216-249.
- Picard, Jean-Michel (1984), 'Bede, Adomnán and the Writing of History' *Peritia* 3, 50-70.
- Picard, Jean-Michel (1985), 'Structural patterns in early Hiberno-Latin hagiography', *Peritia* 4, 67-82 .
- Picard, Jean-Michel (1987), 'The Bible used by Adomnán' in: P.Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (1987)246-257.
- Picard, Jean-Michel (1987), 'Eloquentiae exuberantia: words and forms in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', *Peritia* 6-7, 141-157.
- Picard, Jean-Michel, ed.(1989), 'The strange death of Guaire Mac Áedáin,' in: Ó Corrain *et al.*(1989)367-375.

- Picard, Jean-Michel, ed.(1991), *Ireland and Northern France AD600-850*, (Dublin).
- Piggott, Stuart, ed.(1962), *The Prehistoric Peoples of Scotland*, (London )
- Piggott, Stuart (1968), *The Druids*, (Thames & Hudson).
- Plummer, C.(1910), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, (2 vols; Oxford).
- Popper, Karl R.(1961), *The poverty of historicism*, 2nd ed.reprinted (with some corrections), (Routledge & K.Paul, 1961).
- Pyches, D.(1985), *Come Holy Spirit*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton).
- Remus, H.(1982), 'Does Terminology Distinguish Early Christian from Pagan Miracles?' *J. Biblical Literature* 104.4, 531-551.
- Remus, H.(1983), *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century*, (Patristic Monograph Series No 10) (Philadelphia Patristic Foundation).
- Rhys, J.(1901), *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (Oxford).
- Richardson, A.(1969), 'Miracle' in: Richardson, A.(ed), *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM) 216-217.
- Ritchie, A.(1984), 'The Archaeology of the Picts: Some current problems', *BAR* 125 (Oxford), 1-6.
- Ritchie, A.(1989), *Picts*, (Edinburgh).
- Ross, Anne, (1986), *The Pagan Celts* (Batsford, London).
- Rouselle, A.(1976), 'From Sanctuary to Miracle-Worker: Healing in Fourth-Century Gaul', tr. & ed. E. Forster and O.&P.M. Ranum in: *Ritual, Religion, and the Sacred* vol 7 (Baltimore and London 1982), 95-127.
- Royal Irish Academy, *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (Dublin: RIA, 1913-1976).
- Rusch, W.G.(1978), *The Later Latin Fathers* (London: Duckworth).
- Ruthven, Jon (1993), *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical miracles* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield).
- Schatzman, S.(1987), *A Pauline Theology of Charismata*, (Peabody: Hendrikson).
- Sharpe, R.(1982), 'Vitae S. Brigitae : The Oldest Texts', *Peritia* 1, 81-106.
- Sharpe, R.(1984), 'Some problems Concerning the Organisation of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia* 3, 230-270.
- Sharpe, R.(1989), 'Quattuor Sanctissimi Episcopi: Irish Saints before St Patrick', in: Ó Corráin *et al.* (1989)376-399.
- Sharpe, R.(1991), *Medieval Irish Saint's Lives*, (Oxford).
- Sharpe, R.(1992) 'Churches and Communities in Early Medieval Ireland: towards a pastoral model.' in: J.Blair & R.Sharpe(1992)81-109.
- Sherry, Patrick (1984) *Spirit, Saints and Immortality*, (London: Macmillan).
- Sims-Williams, P.(1996), 'Review of McCone(1990)', *Éigse* 29, 177-196.
- Skene, W.F.(1886-90), *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban*, (3 vols, Edinburgh).

- Smith, Julia M.H.(1992), 'Review Article: Early Medieval hagiography in the late twentieth century', in: *Early Medieval Europe* 1(1), 69-76.
- Smyth, A. P.(1984), *Warlords and Holy Men (Scotland AD 80-1000)*, (Edinburgh Univ. Press repr.1992).
- Smyth, A.P.(1972), 'The earliest Irish annals', *Proc. Royal Irish Academy* 72 C, 1-48.
- Smyth, Marina (1986), 'The physical world in seventh century Hiberno-Latin texts' *Peritia* 5, 201-234.
- Smyth, Marina (1996), *Understanding the Universe in Seventh-Century Ireland*, (Boydell, Woodbridge).
- Stancliffe, C.(1983), *St Martin and his hagiographer: History and miracle in Sulpicius Severus*, (Oxford).
- Stancliffe, C.(1992), 'The Miracle Stories in Seventh Century Irish Saints Lives', in: Fontaine & Hillgarth (1992)87-115.
- Stokes, W. & Strachan, J.(1901), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose and Verse*. 2 vols (Cambridge 1901-3) Supplement (Halle 1910).
- Swete, H.B.(1912), *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*, (London: Macmillan).
- Swinburne, R., ed.(1970), *The Concept of Miracle* (London: Macmillan).
- Swinburne, R., ed.(1989), *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan).
- Taylor, J.V.(1972), *The Go-Between God*, (London: SCM).
- Theissen, G.(1983, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark)
- Thomas, A.C.(1968), 'The evidence from North Britain' in: *Christianity in Britain, 300-700* ed. M.W.Barley and R.P.C. Hanson (Leicester 1968), pp93-121.
- Thomas, A.C.(1971), *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*, (London & Glasgow).
- Thomas, A.C.(1981), *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD500*, (London).
- Thomas, A.C.(1988), 'The "monster" episode in Adomnán's Life of St Columba', *Cryptozoology*, 7 (Tucson, Ariz.)38-45.
- Thomas, A.C.(1990), 'Gallici nautae de Galliarum prouincis - A sixth / seventh century trade with Gaul reconsidered', *Medieval Archaeology* 34, 1-26.
- Thompson, E.A.(1958), 'The Origin of Christianity in Scotland', *SHR* xxxvii, 17-22.
- Thompson, E.A.(1984), *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the end of Roman Britain*, (Woodbridge: Studies in Celtic History 6).
- Thompson, E.A.(1985), *Who was St. Patrick?* (Woodbridge).
- Thurneysen, R.(1921), *Die irische Helden-und Königsage*, (Halle).



- Torrance, Thomas F.(1965),*Theology in reconstruction*, (London: SCM).
- Torrance, Thomas F.(1971), *God and rationality*, (London : Oxford University Press).
- Turner, Max (1996), *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts Then and Now*, (Carlisle: Paternoster).
- Twelftree, G.H.(1993), *Jesus the Exorcist* (Peabody: Hendrickson).
- Van Dam, R.(1993), *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, (Princeton).
- Van der Essen, (1911), 'Review of *Vita Sanctorum Hiberniae*', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 12, 526-8.
- Vendryes, (1911), 'Review of *Vita Sanctorum Hiberniae*', *RC* 32, 104-6.
- Wainwright, F.T.(1955), *The Problem of the Picts*, (Edinburgh).
- Ward, B.(1982), *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: 1000-1215*, (Philadelphia).
- Warren, F.E. & Stevenson, J.(1987), *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church*, (Woodbridge).
- Watkin-Jones, Howard (1922), *The Holy Spirit in the Medieval Church*, (London: Epworth).
- Watson W.J.(1915), 'The Celtic Church in its relations with Paganism', *Celtic Review* X (November), 263-279.
- Wenham, G., and Blomberg, C., eds (1986), *Gospel Perspectives VI, The Miracles of Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT).
- Whitelock, D., McKitterick, R. & Dumville, D., eds (1982), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, (Cambridge)..